

Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy

The Deep Battle Against America



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Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare

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For Janet and Thomas

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Note on Transliteration

In this book, I have used a simplified version of the U.S. Library of Congress system of transliteration. I have not distinguished between long and short vowels nor used subscripted diacritical marks. For the letter ‘ayn, I use the diacritic (‘) in the medial and final positions only, as in *shari‘ah* and *shuru‘*. I represent the letter *hamza* by the diacritic (‘) in the medial and final positions only, as in *qa‘id* and *liqa‘*. The definite article is always shown as *al* and never elided with the previous word. The feminine marker, *ta marbuta*, is represented by a final *ah*; the adjectival *-ya* followed by *ta marbuta* is rendered *-iyyah*. This system is used for proper names unless there is a variant in common use. I have generally rendered Arabic titles for books and articles according to the ordinary system used in English. For names usually pronounced according to the Cairene usage, I have occasionally substituted “g” for the expected “j.”

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Introduction

The laws of revolutionary war are a problem which anyone directing a revolutionary war must study and solve.

—Mao Tse-tung, *The Art of War*

THE DEEP BATTLE

When I began writing this book in early 2010, I thought that Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri would likely be killed before I finished. I actually thought that al-Zawahiri, with his much greater public profile, would be first. The reality proved otherwise: on May 1, 2011, elite American military and intelligence professionals located and killed Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. My immediate fear was that Americans would equate killing al-Qaeda's paramount leader with victory. Indeed, there were scenes of celebration and jubilation on the streets of Washington, D.C.

Bin Laden's most dangerous accomplishment was to become the charismatic icon of al-Qaeda and its idea of global jihad. This motivating force has been resilient in the past, and I was concerned that al-Qaeda would continue planning after Bin Laden's death and, if the United States stopped paying attention, grow even more dangerous. Though American bullets cut down Osama bin Laden, global jihad is a powerful idea with a life of its own, one that bullets cannot touch. Truly, we are fighting two battles. The killing of Bin Laden was a victory in the "close battle" of combat, but there is more to be done if we are to defeat al-Qaeda in the "deep battle" of ideas. The West needs to learn more about the strategic thinking inside al-Qaeda in order to counter it. That is the purpose of this book.

The “deep battle” is crucial because, unless the United States wins major victories in the war of ideas, Bin Laden will join other ideologues of violent jihad in a lineup of iconic “martyrs” who consider the United States their most important enemy and whose ideas continue to inspire generations of violent jihadists. Among these martyrs is the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, executed for subversive activities in 1966 by the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Qutb was an important Egyptian writer who added intellectual heft to the efforts of religious radicals trying to overthrow the Egyptian government, and his writings gained international power after his execution. Death made Qutb a defiant martyr, and his work inspired a new jihadist ideology that still motivates al-Qaeda and other jihadist operatives today. A second example is Abd al-Salam Faraj, also executed by the Egyptian government in 1982 for his role in the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat. Faraj’s plan for revolution inside Egypt failed, but his ideas have lived on in the pamphlet entitled *Al-Jihad al-Faridah al-Gha’ibah (Jihad Is the Hidden Obligation)*, which is a key element of al-Qaeda’s concept of jihad to this day.

What is true for individuals is also true for groups. The American close battle has eliminated one al-Qaeda leader after another and killed large numbers of jihadist insurgents and terrorists. So far, other leaders have risen to replace their comrades, and young men continue to replenish al-Qaeda’s ranks. Likewise, the United States has helped regional allies destroy al-Qaeda affiliates and partners only to see them rise from the ashes. In the Arabian Peninsula, for example, President Ali Abdullah Saleh had destroyed al-Qaeda in Yemen by 2004. By 2006, Saudi Arabia had destroyed its al-Qaeda presence. Yet by 2009, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had emerged inside Yemen and is potentially more dangerous than its predecessors. Elsewhere, the United States and its Afghan partners crushed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan after 9/11 and routed al-Qaeda. The Taliban reemerged in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. In 2012, al-Qaeda still

threatens Afghanistan and constitutes one of the many serious threats to the Pakistani state. Al-Qaeda morphed from an organization into a terrorist system boasting significant transnational reach.

Clearly, removing the al-Qaeda leadership and crushing the network in a single locale are not sufficient strategies. The United States needs to confront al-Qaeda ideologically with an effective counternarrative, and this requires a full understanding of al-Qaeda's strategic thinking. In this book, I examine al-Qaeda's own documents, now widely available on the Internet, as rich sources of jihadist history and strategic thought. Most importantly, each of these texts shows us events from an insider's perspective. The main objectives of this book are:

1. To demonstrate that al-Qaeda and its allies have a detailed, coherent strategy that tells us what they hope to achieve and how
2. To describe that strategy from the perspective of key al-Qaeda strategists
3. To suggest some first principles of an effective counternarrative to al-Qaeda

THE CLOSE BATTLE AND THE DEEP BATTLE

In late 2010, General Michael V. Hayden, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (2006–2009), gave the keynote speech at the Jamestown Foundation's annual terrorism conference about the use of covert and overt intelligence. The subtext of the address was how to understand and defeat al-Qaeda, almost ten years after Osama Bin Laden ordered the attack on the United States and at least thirteen years after he had begun planning it. Since 2001, the United States has engaged in two regional wars and a full-scale intelligence operation involving advanced drone technology; meanwhile, al-Qaeda affiliates stretch from North Africa to the Philippines. The unstated premise of the former DCI's talk is that we do not fully understand al-Qaeda,

despite elaborate plans to defeat the organization and the published contributions of many scholars and counterterrorism experts. In fact, the United States does know a great deal about global jihadism today, but most of this knowledge is tactical and organizational intelligence, which is crucial for the close battle but less valuable for attacking ideology and strategy. Hayden pointed out that, in one instance of a plot hatched in the United Kingdom, the only unknown was when our allies would arrest the plotters.¹

This presents a paradox: the American government is able to know a great deal about al-Qaeda's tactics and operations but is little able to engage in a deep battle of ideas. He further noted that as director of the Central Intelligence Agency he was intensely focused on the close battle: disrupting plots, capturing or killing their planners, and improving American defenses. These responsibilities leave little time for government, intelligence, and military agencies to devote to the deep battle of ideas and ideology. Indeed, he suggested that this should be an area of focus for research institutions and universities.

The U.S. government also has trouble engaging in the deep battle when al-Qaeda leaders shroud the organization in the mantle of Islam. Violent jihadism claims to represent the fundamentalist revival movement within Islam, an argument that confounds rebuttals from both secular representatives and coreligionists. Ideological attacks on al-Qaeda are often characterized as an affront to Islam rather than a condemnation of a terrorist organization that contorts Islamic texts and principles for its unjustifiably violent goals. Tackling this nuance becomes even more complicated when the popular press in the West or the occasional Christian preacher actually does criticize terrorist ideology by attacking Islam. To be sure, al-Qaeda ideology has infected the nervous systems of some Muslim communities, though these represent a global minority. A few violent extremists, however, have proven to be

extremely dangerous in the age of the Internet, when isolated individuals may be inspired to violence by online propaganda.

Although the close battle has become more challenging, we cannot wage the deep battle without it. The costs of conventional American warfare are unsustainable in a tightening economy, but the West needs to sustain intelligence analysis and operations while maintaining or increasing budgets for the elite troops that wage the close battle. Ample costs can be reduced by avoiding long-term deployments of conventional military forces and returning to the doctrine of deploying the American military to achieve clear military objectives, except in rare circumstances after a declaration of war.

The West can engage in the deep battle effectively, and a careful study of al-Qaeda's political-military strategy tells us much that can be useful in this effort. For example, we discover that al-Qaeda's strategy has its origins in the writings of the Cold War communist adversaries. Al-Qaeda's strategic writings may begin and end with Islamic references and prayers, but their core arguments have less to do with Islam than with the texts of communist insurgents and ideologues. Their political-military strategy also requires complex, tortured arguments to square their bloody actions with the morality of ordinary Muslims and most Islamic scholars.

Sometimes, al-Qaeda apologists actually find no sacred text or credible fatwa to justify their actions. In these cases they tend to rely on what they call "universal laws" (*sunan kawniyyah*), which are the product of reason and common understanding. They assert that these "universal laws" are not contrary to Islamic law, although al-Qaeda's strategists point to no justification of their extension of this concept to warfare and politics. One prominent al-Qaeda strategist, Abu Bakr Naji, recommends that cadre leaders learn the tried-and-true principles of warfare and exhorts jihadist leaders to learn "the political game." These arguments are based on

reason rather than religion and, while Naji and others are quick to assert that universal laws of human reason are in agreement with divine law or shari'ah, such assertions are easy enough to accept in general but become difficult to support when applied to indiscriminate terrorist attacks.

These secular aspects of al-Qaeda's doctrine and strategy are subject to rational criticism in the deep battle. Such criticism need not rely on arguments based on Islam. Using positive and rational arguments against al-Qaeda can tear down its ideological appeal to Muslims. A good example of this was a West Point study that showed that al-Qaeda has killed more Muslims than non-Muslims.² Such well-documented articles influence opinions. Presented thoughtfully, positive and secular angles of argument can be effective because the vast majority of Muslims are ready to believe them. Clearly, a religious movement could develop an acceptable political-military strategy based on secular considerations. I intend to demonstrate that al-Qaeda developed a strategy based on secular reasoning, but an examination of it on its own terms reveals that this strategy offends against common Muslim standards of morality. Al-Qaeda's authors are well aware of this issue and work to obfuscate it, but their own words give them away, as we shall see.

AL-QAEDA THE IDEA: THE EVOLUTION OF JIHADIST SALAFISM

The ideology of al-Qaeda represents a mixture of the violent jihadist concepts of the twentieth-century Egyptian ideologues Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Abd al-Salem Faraj with the fundamentalist Islamic movement known as Salafism. This is a forced marriage: the jihadism of late twentieth-century Egypt is violent and political, but Salafism is neither a political movement nor a violent one per se. Salafism, like all religious movements, combines social, spiritual, and intellectual currents with strong normative principles, but it is at root theological, not revolutionary. On the other hand,

Salafists, like other Muslims, generally will support the defense of other Muslims and traditional Muslim lands when non-Muslims threaten either. This type of defensive jihad is sometimes referred to as classic jihad, a term I will use in what follows. This is an important distinction because al-Qaeda consistently attempts to appeal to this concept of jihad while pursuing revolutionary goals that most Middle Easterners would not support.³

Salafism takes a strict constructionist view of Islamic law by relying exclusively on the major texts of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunna (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad). Salafists seek to emulate the reported examples of the *salaf* (predecessors), the earliest Muslim followers of the Prophet Muhammad, and follow an austere and strict interpretation of Islam. It is generally hostile to Shi'ism and any trends within Sunni Islam that are viewed as innovations that fall outside the traditions of the predecessors. Salafism is the religious orientation of the majority of the population of Saudi Arabia, where it is often referred to as Wahhabism. Osama Bin Laden came out of the Wahhabi Salafist tradition, but not all al-Qaeda members fit neatly into this tradition or understanding of their religion. For example, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, one of the major strategic influences on al-Qaeda, has argued that the austere, judgmental tradition of Salafism limited the appeal of al-Qaeda by excluding many people of different Islamic orientations.⁴ All the while, al-Suri personally espoused a religious orientation that closely tracks with Salafist beliefs.

What sets al-Qaeda apart from the majority of Salafists and the vast majority of Muslims is the organization's view of jihad. Al-Qaeda authors sometimes refer to their movement as jihadist Salafism. For al-Qaeda, jihad is not merely a defensive, communal duty; it is an individual obligation that, in effect, requires Muslims to fight non-Muslims until Islam is triumphant on a global scale. Western scholars often refer to this jihadist orientation as global jihad. Al-Qaeda is not quick

to distinguish between classic and global jihad precisely because it often recruits young men from the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa who have a classic jihad orientation. To capitalize on the majority view of jihad as defensive, al-Qaeda promotes the propaganda line that the United States is at war with Islam and has been for decades. Much al-Qaeda propaganda argues that “war on terrorism” is synonymous with “war against Islam.” Al-Qaeda finds an audience for this, and part of American strategy in the deep battle must include a credible approach to debunk the false propaganda of an American war on Islam without abandoning a vigorous counterterrorism strategy against al-Qaeda and its allies.

Religious arguments advanced by al-Qaeda’s leadership are made by men who, with a few exceptions, are not schooled in Islamic jurisprudence or “religious sciences” (*ulum al-din*). Instead, al-Qaeda leaders and strategists have based their approach to terrorism on a combination of a study of “fourth-generation warfare” (4GW, used as a synonym for asymmetric warfare) and a deep study of classic guerrilla warfare.⁵ In short, they studied the strategies of people they believe to have defeated the United States in the past. The genius of al-Qaeda’s strategy was to cloak itself so thoroughly in Islamic and Salafist symbols and vocabulary that many in the West doubted that this rational strategy existed. It has been all too easy to blame their actions falsely on Islam and scapegoat its religious principles.⁶

Moreover, al-Qaeda’s public face has never prominently featured the political-military strategy of jihad; its communications program focuses on traditional appeals to honor and religion in propaganda videos, communiqués by Osama Bin Laden, and the majority of essays written by al-Qaeda operatives. Al-Qaeda recruits are often inexperienced young men without military training who are looking for a cause. For this reason, one of its major strategic authors, Abu Bakr Naji, refers those interested in political-military strategy to the works of Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi. One of al-Qurashi’s

articles in early 2002 bore the captivating title “Fourth-Generation Warfare.” Al-Qurashi learned about 4GW by reading American articles on the subject, which he cited in his articles. The fact that American troops found one of the foundational papers on 4GW, dating from 1989, in the Tora Bora caves of Afghanistan indicates that 4GW was a central interest of al-Qaeda even during its Afghan phase.⁷

METHODOLOGY: STRATEGY OR STRATEGISTS?

The authors of al-Qaeda’s strategic literature are often avid readers and surprisingly careful writers. Like their leaders, these writers did not have a religious education. One is much more likely to find someone who has studied engineering or some practical science in al-Qaeda’s inner circle than someone who has earned a certificate from a religious university. The strategists are more likely to cite modern sources than religious ones, although their writings are sprinkled with cherry-picked passages from religious texts. For example, the authors of al-Qaeda’s strategic literature cite Mao Tse-tung, Clausewitz, Che Guevara, General Giap, and Robert Taber’s *War of the Flea*. One can trace this literature’s intellectual genealogy to the leftist revolutionary strategies of the twentieth century and anti-imperialistic sentiments of the postcolonial period in the Middle East.

Al-Qaeda strategists are also avid readers of American military strategy, doctrine, and intellectual debates. With this intellectual background, al-Qaeda has spread global terror in a way that the world has not previously witnessed. Though we tend to dismiss their crimes as “senseless” acts of terror, for al-Qaeda these acts fit into a logic of death that we may not have fully recognized. Many al-Qaeda documents were written by men who had every reason to believe that they would soon die and wanted to leave a legacy that would guide young men to take up arms against America, its allies, and most of the governments in the Middle East. As Brynjar Lia and Thomas Hegghammer have shown, a whole genre exists that they term “jihadi strategic

studies.”⁸ This literature is characterized by a professional, sometimes academic approach to its material, and it seeks to learn from jihadist mistakes by capturing the history of failed, quixotic ventures from North Africa to South Asia. It is not written to recruit but to teach jihadists how to avoid old problems and enact strategies for success.

Documents alone are not sufficient to establish al-Qaeda’s strategy; we need to explore its actions as well. The approach I have taken follows a piece of advice given by al-Qaeda to those Muslims who might doubt that the organization follows a rational plan. The advice appeared in a document published by AQAP in 2010: “Consider al-Qaeda’s strategy and then consider whether they [al-Qaeda members] are following it or not.” This document explicitly points out that the strategy that AQAP follows is contained in the book *Idarah al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (*The Administration of Savagery*) by Abu Bakr Naji.⁹

Based on literature such as Naji’s, my book decodes al-Qaeda’s violent jihadist strategy: its origins, evolution, strengths, and weaknesses. Bin Laden left the detailed development and exposition of his strategy to others. The most important among these strategists created a body of work that, like the work of Qutb or Faraj before them, continues to be a driving force, notwithstanding the death or capture of its authors. Books and articles produced by al-Qaeda’s ideologues and strategists have an impact far beyond their direct readership. They are used as training aids inside terrorist networks and clandestine cells. They serve as sources for recruiting videos and speeches that are spread across the globe via the Internet and, most likely, on portable hard drives.

Books of jihadist strategy are never the objects most sought after on jihadist websites; religious tracts and sermons always occupy this place.¹⁰ The authors of al-Qaeda’s strategic literature, however, do not aim at ordinary readers. Before the Internet, the target audiences were usually only those few operatives who

had undergone a radicalization process and were prepared to act on what they read either by teaching others or by carrying out terrorist operations. Sometimes the contents of these documents were transformed into audiocassettes or videos for wider distribution. With the advent of the Internet and its penetration of the Middle East, professionally reproduced copies of the documents are readily available to cells and would-be cells across the globe. Saudi Arabian authorities found Abu Bakr Naji's book in the possession of terrorist insurgents inside Saudi Arabia.¹¹ Copies of the works of the al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri have been found in training camps in Afghanistan and on the computers of terrorist cells in Europe and Middle Eastern countries.¹²

Al-Qaeda's ideology and strategy are sophisticated and well established in an international network. The strategy is flexible, resilient, and multifaceted, having developed from its origins in Egypt into a global jihad that has sparked the definitive conflicts of the twenty-first century thus far. By no means, however, do I imply that there is a unified network of all jihadists who follow central direction or even follow a central political-military strategy. This does not exist. There are many varieties of jihadist organizations and insurrections, but only al-Qaeda developed a strategy that broke with tradition and specifically targeted the United States across the globe. Jihad (and here I mean jihad as warfare against the enemies of Islam) in its classic form does not have to constitute the United States as an enemy, but in 1996 and again in 1998 al-Qaeda, through its leader, Osama Bin Laden, declared war on the United States and its allies. Over time, a number of organizations have sworn allegiance to al-Qaeda and agreed to follow its global strategy and aims.¹³

Many of my assertions are not conventional wisdom. It is still common to hear that al-Qaeda has no grand strategy beyond the vague vision of restoring the caliphate in all Muslim lands and enforcing an austere version of shari'ah law. Many specialists and experts in

counterterrorism tend to say that al-Qaeda does not have a formal or grand strategy in the sense that great powers recognize. There is no evidence, for example, that there is a single document produced at al-Qaeda central headquarters and distributed for action to the appropriate franchises and cells. There is, however, a great deal of evidence to suggest that tactical manuals and books on terrorist doctrine are distributed to individual cells and larger operations on an international scale. Police organizations and military forces confiscate these documents in raids, and they are published as evidence in court cases or on government websites. It is clear that al-Qaeda's leaders plan for years before major terrorist attacks. We are left with a vexing question: does al-Qaeda plan and plot without producing a strategy, or does their training and communications network represent a decentralized strategy that has become more system than organization?

One expert on jihadism, Jarrett Brachman, has captured the essence of this problem well: "One often hears discussion in the counter-terrorism community about the need to know al-Qaeda's strategy. But this question is slightly misguided. There is no single Jihadist strategy. There are, however, Jihadist strategists."¹⁴ Brachman argues that the best way to approach a description of jihadist strategy is "to examine the writings of these strategists on a number of key issue areas." "Writings" in this context means everything from books to blogs, tapes, lectures, magazine articles, and Internet forums. Although I have taken advantage of the fine work done by scholars such as Brachman, I have concluded from a broad search of al-Qaeda's strategic literature that we can extract a baseline of its post-9/11 political-military strategy from several sets of key primary source documents:

- Ideological documents about jihad written mostly by Egyptians in periods surrounding attempts to overthrow the secular government

- Documents written as studies or research into the various conditions of jihad in the period from the Muslim Brotherhood's insurrection against Syria in the 1980s, as well as leading up to and during the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan
- Strategic studies and articles written by the Afghan Arabs associated with al-Qaeda after they were scattered by the American and allied forces' invasion of Afghanistan after September 11, 2001¹⁵

None of these documents was produced in the sense that the American J-5 drafts war plans or the National Security Council approves a national strategy.¹⁶ Often, they more closely resemble academic studies or articles written by journalists that describe military strategies and existing doctrine. The documents are sometimes ideological justifications for jihad; alternatively, they are intended to train insiders in the big-picture approach of al-Qaeda's leadership. These source documents are primarily in Arabic and are generally available online. It is a vast literature, from which I analyze a representative sample of the most crucial contributions.

I have read widely within published Arabic sources and online jihadist forums. I also reviewed a more restricted number of video and audio presentations, though I discovered these were useful for analyzing propaganda and recruitment programs but not as useful for understanding political-military strategy. I was genuinely surprised to discover the level of professionalism in a number of jihadist strategic texts. Unlike public speeches and propaganda, strategic writings are often candid about the weaknesses and strengths of the jihadist movement. The authors of jihadist strategic literature take great care to document their assertions with authoritative sources (often from the United States), and whenever possible they avail themselves of peer review within jihadist circles. They do not reveal the details of operations, tactics, or the

identities of other jihadists, but the authors make reference to other sources for further study. As mentioned previously, influences on jihadist strategy come almost entirely from outside the realm of Islam. As previously discussed, they are also mostly secular in nature, although they are adorned with some religious text and argument. By following the writers' leads and mining original sources, I have been able to sketch a hierarchy of influences and an ideational map of al-Qaeda strategy through their most comprehensive, representative texts.

I began with Abu Bakr Naji's *The Administration of Savagery*, which is widely recognized as a major work of jihadist strategic literature and used as a source of guidance for al-Qaeda's jihad in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Naji refers his readers to a number of other jihadist authors who were close to al-Qaeda's leadership. Naji's allusions and footnotes point toward Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, who had original contributions to make to the explanation of what Naji refers to as the Salafist jihadist enterprise, which he expected his readers to know in general terms from personal experience. Strikingly, these authors point their readers further to sources within the American and European traditions of military strategy and doctrine, arriving at a constellation of strategists following the thinking of Mao Tse-tung on guerrilla warfare. In addition to al-Qurashi and al-Muqrin, Naji also cites the prolific and somewhat independent Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who provides unique insights into decades of jihadist activity before al-Qaeda, personal insights into the American counterattack after 9/11, and a roadmap for the homegrown or lone-wolf terrorists in the United States who are part of the global jihad enterprise.

The analysis of primary documents, of course, is not sufficient to establish that they contain an actionable strategy. For this we need a *ground-truth* test to assess whether terrorist cells and insurgencies are acting in a fashion that objectively enacts a grand strategy

described in the primary sources. Fortunately, a number of excellent sources on jihadism and thoroughly researched histories of specific insurgencies have become available in recent years. I will refer to these consistently throughout, as I compare written strategy to operations. The results are revealing. Al-Qaeda's highest priorities for jihad are clearly identified by Abu Bakr Naji and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri as rooted in jihad in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Both of these areas were cases of direct involvement by both Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, and both have received a high level of analysis not just by the United States but also by counterterrorism experts across the globe.

Unopposed, the ideology and strategy that sustains al-Qaeda and its affiliates will continue to fuel attempts to achieve its goals through violent means. Those continued attempts could be costly in terms of lives and treasure, although their effects can be mitigated to a great degree. Truly, the devil is in the details. The strategy that I describe is global in scope but is focused on the Arabian Peninsula and the petroleum industry, and it is attempting to create a viable network of independent terrorists inside the United States. It is my hope that, by examining representative documents written by professional jihadists closely associated with Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the reader not only will be able to discern al-Qaeda's persistent strategy but also will start to understand how these enemies of the United States and its allies think.

In general conversation in the West, those with the strongest voices concerning how to talk about al-Qaeda and jihadism arrange themselves in two distinct camps. The first camp generally states that in order to fight a war successfully, one needs to know and describe one's enemy. Since the United States is in a war with an international terrorist group that cloaks itself in Islam and describes counterterrorism as a war on the Islamic faith, those in this camp argue that there is a problem with Islam and that American officials should forgo "political

correctness” and name the enemy in religious terms. The second camp asserts that Islam is a religion of peace and that to associate Islam with terrorism (as in the phrase “Islamic terrorism”) is a form of Islamophobia. Neither camp is by any means monolithic, yet both ignore the fact that al-Qaeda has a rational strategy and complex literature that can inform and guide our discussions and policies. Ultimately, I will be suggesting a way for public officials and others to address al-Qaeda’s revolutionary strategy while countering the appearance of any ideological and counterproductive attack on Islam. My recommendations will rely on what al-Qaeda insiders have stated about their own global enterprise. Seen from this perspective, al-Qaeda’s “global jihad” is not a genuine Islamic invocation but is a substitute term for “global revolutionary war.”

In decoding al-Qaeda’s strategy and offering recommendations, I draw on both my academic and professional background. The textual analysis employs the tools of language and analysis more familiar to a commentary tradition of classical texts than to political science. These are techniques acquired in my doctorate at Harvard University in Islamic studies. I have also benefited from years as a political-military analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense and my professional interactions with security establishments in Middle Eastern countries. My methodology is thus a hybrid of academic and practical considerations that looks to discover what jihadist political-military strategists propagate as a gateway to knowing the enemy’s character and intentions. I did not intend to prove or discover a theory about jihadism but to explore whether there is a fact-based outline of jihadist strategy after 9/11. And I quickly discovered that jihadist literature claiming to describe such a strategy has been contained almost entirely within al-Qaeda’s orbit of an ideological global jihad.

[Chapter 1](#) presents a brief historical and ideological background to al-Qaeda’s version of global jihad. It

describes Salafism and the distinction between this powerful theological movement and the ideology of al-Qaeda, which is sometimes described as “Salafist jihadism.” I will also show how the Muslim Brotherhood’s program and goals overlap and then sharply diverge from al-Qaeda’s violent methods. The development of a new concept of jihad in the writings of the Egyptian jihadists Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj will be examined. Finally, the parallel development of the version of Salafism in Saudi Arabia, best known as Wahhabism, will be described.

[Chapter 2](#) describes the relationship between Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, with a focus on the development of a post-9/11 strategy, by examining al-Zawahiri’s brief strategic template, which he offers in his post-9/11 book *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*. This examination takes advantage of the recent online publication of two Arabic versions authorized by al-Zawahiri himself; these editions come more than eight years after the original partial English translation that appeared in December 2001.

[Chapter 3](#) begins the review of al-Qaeda’s strategists with Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin. Al-Qurashi, an advisor to Bin Laden, wrote a number of articles in Arabic on military strategy in the online magazine *Al-Ansar* (2002–2003). The analysis will focus on “Revolutionary Wars” as well as on some of his post-9/11 offerings, including “Al-Qaeda and the Art of War,” “Fourth-Generation Warfare,” “From Munich to New York,” and “America and the Crusader Campaign: Where To?” In these works we discover the influence of twentieth-century communist revolutionary strategy on the thinking of al-Qaeda and the organization’s emphasis on fourth-generation warfare in its international operations. The rest of the chapter turns to Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, an Afghan Arab sent by al-Qaeda’s top leadership to be a military leader inside Saudi Arabia in 2002. His book, *A Practical Course for Guerrilla War*, is an authentic training manual used by the 2003–2006

jihād in Saudi Arabia, and it is still referred to in 2011 by the Yemen-based AQAP. Al-Muqrin's life is also a fascinating example of the indoctrination, education, and development of a major al-Qaeda military leader.

[Chapter 4](#) examines the content and implications of Abu Bakr Naji's *The Administration of Savagery*. Most experts have recognized the importance of Naji's book, which was confiscated by Saudi security officials when they arrested suspected al-Qaeda terrorists in 2008. It is a recipe for preparing and conducting a regional insurgency in the al-Qaeda mode and a prime example of how al-Qaeda bases regional operations within the context of a protracted war against the United States, including attacks inside the United States and its overseas interests. I will describe Naji's explanation of Salafist jihadism within the modern history of the Middle East. The chapter reveals the rational basis of a three-stage guerrilla strategy, lays out al-Qaeda's top leadership priorities for jihad, and presents an operational plan for implementing regional jihad. It examines Naji's description of various political-military principles involved in preparing the population for jihad, time-tested military principles, and learning to play the "political game." Naji also provides insights into the various obstacles in al-Qaeda's path and considers the weaknesses of al-Qaeda's approach. I will also explore the relationship between Naji's strategy and al-Qaeda's jihad in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

In [chapter 5](#), I will turn to the works of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri to examine the history of jihadist movements through al-Suri's eyes, including lessons learned from earlier regional jihads in Syria and Algeria. I will describe the relationship of the somewhat independent al-Suri to Osama Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and other Afghan Arabs during his time in Afghanistan and Pakistan. [Chapter 5](#) also analyzes what al-Suri calls "the heart" of his magnum opus, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*. The discussion will relate al-Suri's description of the "three circles of jihad" to al-Qaeda's international,

nonhierarchical system. A focus of this chapter is al-Suri's unique description of global independent and small-cell terrorism and how they may serve global jihad's central purpose of destroying the political will of the United States.

The conclusion summarizes al-Qaeda strategy and its status after the death of Bin Laden and suggests concrete steps that the West can take in the deep battle of ideas. Al-Qaeda declared war on the United States in the name of Islam. There is no question that many of the top leadership are pious Muslims in their private lives. But we know enough about al-Qaeda's secular strategy and actions to engage in a war of ideas that does not mistakenly attack the Islamic faith and alienate the majority of Muslims who in no way support global jihad and its legacy of death and destruction. The strategists of al-Qaeda have revealed what they believe to be America's strengths, and I believe that we can rely on those very strengths to attack al-Qaeda effectively and comprehensively in both close and deep combat. After all, the close battle is necessary to defend our people, principles, and interests on the ground, but ideas have lives of their own. The deep battle is where this war will ultimately be won.

One

The Historical Roots of Al-Qaeda's Ideology

Mankind today is standing at the edge of an abyss ... because of the global bankruptcy of the values that would enable the healthy development of human life.

—Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones Along the Path*

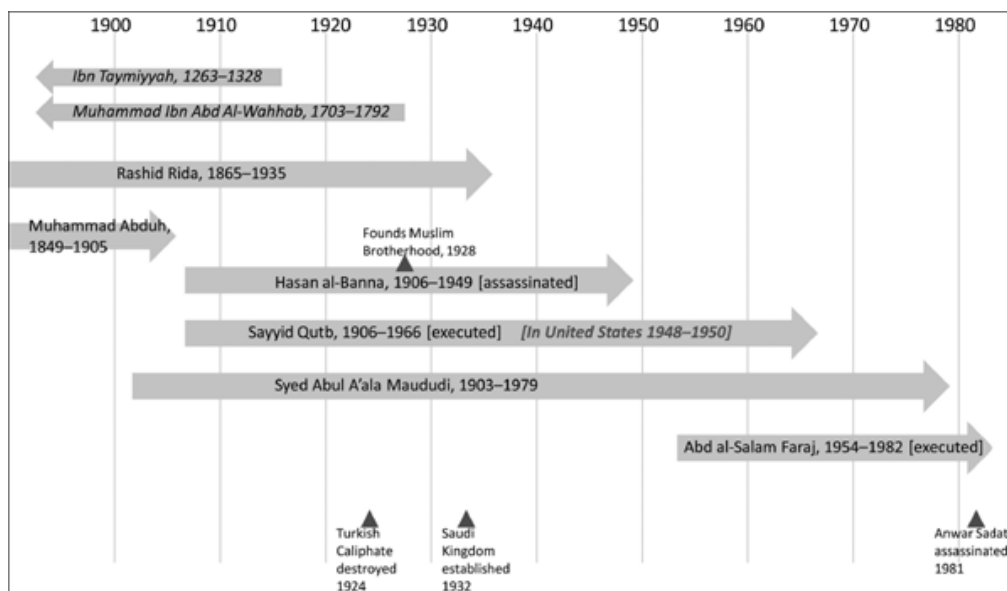


Figure 1.1 Timeline: Before Al-Qaeda

SPREAD OF REVOLUTIONARY SALAFISM

Why does al-Qaeda still exist after a quarter-century of warfare with the United States, one of the strongest military, economic, and political powers the world has ever known? What is its appeal to Middle Easterners and others who do not approve of their violent methods and would not wish to be governed by a regime designed by Osama Bin Laden or Ayman al-Zawahiri? Why do groups like the Taliban or the Emirate of Chechnya seem to want an affiliation, even though

their local concerns do not immediately seem to line up with al-Qaeda's focus and emphasis at any given time? Part of the answer lies in the fact that al-Qaeda is riding the wave of Salafism (*al-Salafiyyah*), the most powerful ideological current in modern Islamic history. Salafism is a reforming version of Islam, austere in its practices and in theology, reliant only on the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and his earliest followers, and generally understood within Sunni Islam to extend through the period of the first three caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman). Another part of the answer is that al-Qaeda has established itself as a militant force that rejects the hegemony of the United States and its regional allies. Al-Qaeda's propaganda targets individuals and communities that resent America's overwhelming military power and consistent support for Israel.

Since World War I, what the propagandists of violent jihad call the "Sykes-Picot era," Islam is perceived by many Muslims to have suffered numerous humiliations, first at the hands of European colonial powers and more recently by the United States.¹ Al-Qaeda became a symbol of uncorrupted resistance to these powers. Their propaganda exploits this appeal, even though most Salafists disagree with al-Qaeda. It is crucial, at the beginning of the journey into the violent world of jihadist strategy, to distinguish between the majority of pious Salafists and the revolutionary Salafists that follow al-Qaeda's line, because when the West fails to do so, it risks turning potential allies into enemies.

Salafism spreads a very broad tent. Trying to frame a single definition that captures all who think of themselves as Salafist is bound to be inaccurate. Salafism can include both al-Qaeda and other Muslims that are as often targets of al-Qaeda as not. For example, the rulers of Saudi Arabia and al-Qaeda are both Salafist in orientation yet are considered deadly enemies. It is doubtful that either side would consider the other to be truly Salafist. The Norwegian scholar Thomas Hegghammer has argued persuasively that it makes little

sense to use the term Salafism to describe a consistent rationale for action, “for the simple reason that actors labeled salafi have wildly different, often diametrically opposing political agendas.”² Salafist websites not affiliated with al-Qaeda make very clear statements that Islam is opposed both to terrorism and to making innocent people bear the burden of revenge aimed at their governments. Numerous Salafist religious scholars decried the 9/11 attacks and other terrorist actions; most Salafists today are peaceful. Another scholar, Quintan Wiktorowicz, has argued that “Al-Qaeda and other radical fundamentalists that constitute the new ‘global jihadi movement’ are not theological outliers. They are part of a broader community of Islamists known as ‘Salafis.’”³ Wiktorowicz has divided Salafists into three broad categories: purists, politicos, and jihadists. He states that while there is theological consensus among Salafists, they disagree about the use of violence. I agree that Salafism is not a useful concept to predict whether an individual or group will sanction al-Qaeda-type violence, but it does designate a theologically useful category and worldview that violent jihadists like al-Qaeda attempt to distort and exploit on a daily basis.⁴ Another prominent scholar, Bernard Haykel, has noted that a Salafist’s politics is “determined by the particular *manhaj* or way Salafis choose to engage in the world.”⁵ The present book will discuss these and other Islamic concepts by reference to the works of violent jihadists themselves and those they rely on for justification. The term Salafism is used by al-Qaeda’s strategists and ideologues and those that follow in their line, as we shall see, and we will need to understand how they use the term that they exploit for their revolutionary purposes.

The Salafist current in Islam is broad and deep. Al-Qaeda represents the violent end of the spectrum. All Salafists, however, share a belief in the Qur’an and the traditions and sayings of the prophet as the only acceptable sources of Islamic law, referred to as the shari’ah. Salafism is the preferred version of Islam for

the majority of the Sunni population of the Arabian Peninsula.⁶

In the Arabian Peninsula, and especially in Saudi Arabia, Salafism can be traced to the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), the great preacher who allied himself with the founder of what became the modern state of Saudi Arabia. This version of Salafism was and is primarily reformist, not revolutionary. In Egypt, Salafism began as a reformist movement, but under social and intellectual pressures, including the effects of colonialism, it developed a violent revolutionary strain that has influenced the course of al-Qaeda's ideology and strategy. Like Salafism in the Arabian Peninsula, Egyptian Salafism owes an intellectual debt to the great religious scholar Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328).

Al-Qaeda embraces powerful and dedicated members from many parts of the world, but at its core, it fuses the thinking of some of the most extreme jihadists Egypt has produced with the fanatical devotion of tribal elements from the Arabian Peninsula. This core has inspired and supported battle-hardened fighters in Central Asia and North Africa to make a resilient mix of operational knowhow, strategic brilliance, and oppressive narrow-mindedness.

Al-Qaeda is composed of a core leadership, a number of franchise organizations, and a number of independent actors.⁷ All are driven by the same ideology: a narrative of the modern experience of Islam as victim and a vision of return to former glories based on adherence to a pristine, if not primitive, form of Sunni Islam. The al-Qaeda organization benefits from a strong current of global organizations, communities, and individuals who, while not violent themselves, share some of al-Qaeda's goals. For example, they may sympathize with its religious message of following in the path of the first Muslims without subscribing to later developments in Islamic history and jurisprudence.

Many Muslims would not choose to live under an al-Qaeda political regime but sympathize with it nonetheless because al-Qaeda is seen as the one group willing to stand up to the United States. Its leaders also gained legitimacy from their successful participation in jihad against the former Soviet Union.⁸ Al-Qaeda's leaders broke the Cold War mold and emerged as an international actor without allegiance to the East or West. The charismatic appeal of standing up to Western powers in the Middle East can override even deep-seated hostility. For example, the Shi'ah Hezbollah movement in Lebanon is widely admired for its war with Israel in southern Lebanon in 2006. Even though most Sunni regional leaders criticized Hezbollah, their populations cheered them on. Some Sunni Muslims in Saudi Arabia were even known to have named their sons after the leader of Hezbollah, something previously considered unthinkable by people often known to be unsympathetic (and sometimes even hostile) to Saudi Shi'ah. In addition, rightly or wrongly, al-Qaeda has often been seen as a religiously motivated organization opposed to corrupt regimes in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia.

As I will demonstrate, al-Qaeda also has developed a flexible strategy and military doctrine based on learning from its own mistakes in the field and from the mistakes of other violent jihadist organizations. Al-Qaeda has clear priorities, short-term goals, a vision of the future, and clearly defined enemies, beginning with the United States. It has proven resilient to the multilayered American response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.

Al-Qaeda stands as the one organization pledged to die to raise the edifice of Islam once again and redress the humiliations that Islam is perceived to have suffered. Five elements embody the essence of this shared sense of humiliation and victimization before the 9/11 attacks:

- The destruction of the Turkish caliphate in 1924 by Turkish nationalist modernizers
- The European colonization of Muslim lands in the Middle Eastern heartland following the Sykes-Picot agreement
- The creation of Israel and its successive military victories over Arab armies
- U.S. regional dominance after the fall of the Soviet Union
- The stationing of American troops in the Arabian Peninsula in response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait

Muslim intellectuals and ordinary people often express a feeling of humiliation at the hands of powerful Western forces. This is not a new phenomenon, yet it is difficult for the West to grasp the power of this widely shared view. In the Western view, especially in the United States (which was never a colonial power in the Middle East), it is hard to understand how American good intentions could be so misunderstood, especially before the American response to the 9/11 attacks. Yet Middle Easterners are likely to echo, probably unconsciously, the words of the great nineteenth-century Egyptian intellectual Muhammad Abduh in an interview for the British *Pall Mall Gazette*: "Do not attempt to do us any more good. Your good has done us too much harm already."⁹ In the twenty-first century, the focus of popular resentment is the United States. The sense of humiliation and attendant resentment for its perceived cause is usually expressed as anger and disappointment focused on American foreign policy rather than hatred of the United States or automatic support for violent jihadist groups. In fact, al-Qaeda is constantly challenged to undercut popular admiration for the United States based on the perceived living standard and the relative freedom of the American people, including American Muslims.¹⁰

The bite of Israeli military victories affected the intellectual and cultural life of Egypt with particular force. In the Egyptian public's view, it was Egypt that bore the brunt of the fighting, had lost the greatest amount of land (the Sinai), and had taken the greatest number of casualties. By the 1970s, Egyptians were tired of war but not yet fully prepared to make peace. The deepest wellsprings of humiliation for the Egyptian public in general were the defeats Egypt suffered in wars with Israel beginning with the war in 1948, which resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel; followed by the 1967 war that resulted in Egypt's loss of the Sinai Peninsula, which Egypt had controlled since the time of the pharaohs; and, last, the 1973 war, which resulted in President Sadat regaining the Sinai, at the cost of horrific casualties for Egyptian forces and a military loss from many points of view. Egyptians celebrated the war as a great victory, but they felt the pain of the loss of life and suffered from the everyday austerity of an economy still on a war footing.

Egypt would make peace with Israel following the 1973 war (in part because of the high costs of ongoing hostilities). Yet Sadat's compromise in making peace with Israel in a deal brokered by the United States constituted another humiliation and betrayal in the minds of some Egyptians.¹¹ At least, this is what many who would become violent jihadists argued. As the Egyptian public left war with Israel behind them, the country saw the rise of domestic wars. This internal warfare pitted the omnipresent and powerful state security forces against a variety of violent jihadist groups.

THE EGYPTIAN PROLOGUE TO AL-QAEDA

In Egypt, Salafism was a term used by Rashid Rida (1865–1935) to capture the essence of the thought of his teacher and great religious reformer, Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905). Abduh intended Salafism to be a highly rational, culturally based alternative to European thought and the tendency to secularism among some Egyptian intellectuals and leaders of his time. Abduh and his

disciple Rida also opposed the mysticism of the Sufi brotherhoods¹² as well as the unexamined acceptance of local folk religious tradition.¹³ Although a version of Salafism was evident among Egyptian religious reformers since the nineteenth century, Egyptian society did not embrace the stricter Salafist version of Islam until the 1970s, when radical Islamic groups began to grow within the universities and the Muslim Brotherhood spawned breakaway radical groups ready for violent revolution, first in Egypt, then in the rest of the Arab world and into non-Arab Central and South Asia.

Modern Egyptian radicalism is the product of the clash between the Muslim Brotherhood (founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928) and the essentially military government that formed after the Egyptian revolution of 1952. Originally, the Brotherhood worked with the Free Officers Movement to expel the British from Egypt. This cooperation came to a dramatic end when the Brotherhood was accused of attempting the assassination of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second president of the new republic. European and American scholars often emphasize that the Muslim Brotherhood has moderated its stance over the years. No one can deny, however, that the Brotherhood has had spinoff organizations that advocate for and attempt the violent overthrow of established governments to achieve the imposition of radical Islamist rule.¹⁴ Many of these spinoff groups and individuals have found their way into the orbit of al-Qaeda.

Many of the Egyptians who found their way to extremist Islamist ranks had belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood but had broken away because they did not consider the Brotherhood radical enough. Through numerous government crackdowns, the Brotherhood had developed a sense of the art of the possible in dealing with the Egyptian government rather than fighting it head on. Al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah (Islamic Group) and Islamic Jihad, or Egyptian Islamic Jihad, became known for their daring and brutal attacks on the existing order.

These groups ultimately failed in Egypt, and their scattered members moved into the orbit of Osama Bin Laden in the Afghanistan jihad against the Soviet Union, in his relocation to Sudan (1992–1996), and again in Afghanistan and the borderlands of Pakistan after 1996. Al-Qaeda strategists learned from the failures of these more radical groups in Egypt, and the Muslim Brotherhood adopted a gradualist approach to jihad and became al-Qaeda's target for scathing criticism.

The Muslim Brotherhood did not always have a nonviolent, gradualist agenda. Its founder Hasan al-Banna set up a "secret apparatus" for covert, violent actions against the colonial regime, including assassinations. Hasan al-Banna's own assassination in 1949 is often cited as a response to the secret apparatus assassination of the Egyptian prime minister Nuqrashi Pasha. Hasan al-Banna also wrote a book on jihad that begins with the assertion that jihad is an obligation for all Muslims.¹⁵ After al-Banna's death, other thinkers, notably Sayyid Qutb, pushed the concept of jihad beyond anticolonial activity to include attacks against indigenous governments claiming to rule Islamic states. With this intellectual and operational history in mind, the Egyptian government regularly cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist organizations within its borders. Major security sweeps occurred especially after alleged plotting against Nasser in the late 1960s, the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, and the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak in 1995. If Osama Bin Laden dreamed of overthrowing the royal family of Saudi Arabia to establish a new Muslim order in the Arabian Peninsula, then the Egyptians who fled Egypt for a second life inside al-Qaeda dreamed of overthrowing the Egyptian system to reestablish Egypt as the center of the Middle East in every sense.

THE CLASSICAL CONTEXT OF JIHADIST DOCTRINE, SOURCES, AND ALTERNATIVES

The concept of jihad exists from the earliest period of Islamic history. The word jihad comes from the Arabic

root *j-h-d*, which generally means to “strive” or “struggle,” but in some of its derived forms the root also means war against non-Muslims.¹⁶ Well-intentioned Muslims and some Western scholars argue that the basic meaning should be taken first to mean something akin to spiritual struggle. Proponents of this view often point to the tradition of the “greater jihad” and the “lesser jihad.” The greater jihad is the internal spiritual struggle to be a good Muslim, which in its most basic sense means adhering to the five pillars of Islam:

Shahada, the testimony of faith in one Allah, with Muhammad as his Prophet

Salat, daily prayer at the five prescribed times

Zakat, alms for the poor and needy

Sawm, fasting during the month of Ramadan from sunrise to sunset

Hajj, the once-in-a-lifetime obligation for pilgrimage to Mecca, if possible

The greater jihad or spiritual struggle also means avoiding sins identified in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. The lesser jihad is taken to mean struggle in the sense of war against non-Muslims. There is also a middle ground, in which one prepares for violent jihad in stages or provides other support for the soldiers of jihad without engaging in combat personally.

Unfortunately, the more pacific point of view about the meaning of jihad, while valid, is moot when speaking about violent jihadist groups. An equally valid interpretation of the word “jihad” includes war against non-Muslims, and that is the way that all self-styled jihadists generally use the word. Hasan al-Banna wrote extensively on jihad, recognizing its many dimensions and including combat as a major component. It is very common to find the Arabic phrase *qital fi sabil Allah* (combat on the path of Allah) as the functional equivalent of jihad. Furthermore, the violent meaning of the word “jihad” far outstrips any other usage in modern Arabic-

language writing, which might indicate that violent jihadists have won the public argument about the meaning of jihad in many quarters. If one turns to classical Arabic texts, for example books of the traditions of the prophet, the violent meaning of jihad crowds out other meanings.¹⁷ For example, the collections of traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*), such as that of Imam Muslim's *al-Jami' al-Sahih* (*The Sound Collection*), contain chapters devoted to jihad and military expeditions.¹⁸ The examples given by Imam Muslim are mostly devoted to the rules governing traditional tribal warfare. Another great collection is *The Sahih* of al-Bukhari, which also contains a chapter devoted to jihad. A number of entries in this chapter appear to support the modern jihadist view that Muhammad valued jihad (in the sense of warfare against non-Muslims) very highly. Since such collections are one of the great underpinnings of Islamic law for all Muslims, this usage of the term "jihad" has a long tradition.

Muslims who do not follow al-Qaeda's line often point out that the classical sense of jihad as *combat on the path of Allah* has traditionally been understood by Muslims after the death of the Prophet (632 c.e.) to mean the combat of a Muslim tribe, nation, or city-state against an invading non-Muslim army. Jihad has not traditionally meant Muslim combat against non-Muslims who were not threatening Muslim communities, let alone Muslim combat against Muslim rulers. The archetype of this type of classic jihad is the warfare waged against Crusader armies, which al-Qaeda and its sympathizers appear to acknowledge in their constant reference to jihad or operations against the "Crusader/Zionist" armies and similar phrases in which Christians are always Crusaders and Jews are always Zionists.

THE MODERN DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSICAL JIHAD THEORY

Classic jihad is relatively straightforward. At its base, it involves a religious and political call to Muslims in a region to mobilize to defend Muslim territories from non-

Muslim invasions or occupation. A step beyond this, but still within the classical tradition, is a more offense-oriented jihad, which entails mobilization of a Muslim population against a potential external threat. Organizations like al-Qaeda, however, have adopted a more violent and radical view of jihad that is based on an Egyptian model, which can be traced back to the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna. Salafist jihadists like al-Qaeda, with their disdain for the Muslim Brotherhood, do not trace their ideology to al-Banna, however. The modernist ideology of Salafist jihadism traces its beginning instead to Sayyid Qutb, who was hanged by the Egyptian government in 1966 for involvement in subversive activities associated with a planned assassination of Gamal Abdel Nasser.¹⁹ Qutb's ideology was taken up by another Egyptian, Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj. Faraj was executed in 1982 for his part in the assassination of President Anwar Sadat.

To understand al-Qaeda's use of this new model, therefore, we need to examine the thought of both Qutb and Faraj. The distinction between classic jihad and al-Qaeda's version, often referred to as "global jihad," is not merely academic. Classic jihad is a much more powerful force for mobilizing populations in the Middle East and South Asia. Al-Qaeda has become masterful at manipulating passions associated with classic jihad. The inability to distinguish between these two can cost Western powers and the United States dearly in the war of ideas, when they inadvertently allow al-Qaeda and its supporters to invoke classic jihad against them without a credible response.

SAYYID QUTB: THE REVOLUTIONARY SALAFIST

Sayyid Qutb, born in 1906 in a village near Asyut in Upper Egypt, is crucial for the development of the ideological base for revolutionary Salafist thinkers who came after him. He is a puzzling personality, at once effete and flinty, cosmopolitan and parochial. From his writings based on his residence in the United States (1948–1950), it is easy to conclude that he was afraid of

strong American women, and his complaints about haircuts he received in America seem overly fastidious. Yet when given the chance to avoid execution, he staunchly refused to make a deal with his executioners because he realized that his writings would be much more powerful if he were to become a martyr for his cause and, perhaps, because he was tired of imprisonment and a life beset by illness.

He admired European civilization and accomplishments but hated almost everything he associated with Western world dominance. His thought appears alternately subtle and crude. His arguments about the elements of Salafism and jihad are astute and compelling to many. His remarks about American life, on the other hand, are cartoonish and show little curiosity and even less desire to understand. When witnessing what might have been an American version of the Irish wake, for example, he does not bother to ask what is behind the seeming merriment. For example, if the participants were following the Irish tradition, one might say that the event was motivated by the celebration of the spiritual value of death as a celebration of salvation and an escape from the “vale of tears” of this life. He concludes instead that the Americans are simply without finer feelings.

Sayyid Qutb is a monument to the fact that not everyone who visits the United States comes away an admirer. While many people might think of the system of democracy as America’s salient contribution to modern civilization, Qutb saw it as the evil human alternative to Allah’s revealed plan for mankind. Some of Sayyid Qutb’s opinions of America are easily found on the Internet, translated for English readers under the title *The America I Have Seen: In the Scale of Human Values*.²⁰ Qutb represents Americans as clever organizationally, with a real talent for applied science. At the same time, he found Americans to be primitive in theoretical science, the fine arts, and moral behavior. In short, he thought of Americans as little more than

cultural barbarians who respect strength and material greatness but lack the slightest regard for refinement and higher culture. The Egyptian sees this paradoxical contrast between material advancement and moral depravity as the reason why America has no moral standing to provide leadership to the world community.

A number of compelling portraits of Sayyid Qutb are available.²¹ My purpose is to focus on several key concepts that Qutb developed to support his call for violent revolutionary jihad in Egypt. Chief among these were *jahiliyyah* (barbarism or ignorance) and *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty), which later became building blocks in al-Qaeda's ideology and are assumed by its strategy. Qutb wrote about these ideas from an Egyptian jail. Before describing them, we need to examine briefly how he arrived there.

Sayyid Qutb's early career was split between working for the Egyptian Ministry of Education and writing poems and essays while also editing Salafist periodicals. In the Egyptian system, the brightest students generally are channeled into engineering and medicine. It is quite common to find engineers and physicians in the ranks of violent jihadists. Qutb stands out among the prominent revolutionaries as a man of letters whose Arabic style rises above that of many of his more pedestrian brothers in arms. His criticism of the existing order in Egypt stopped short of rebellion but created frictions with his government superiors. They arranged for him to study in the United States, perhaps as a way to give him a broader perspective—and possibly as a way to get some relief from his challenging personality. His stay in America hardened his views, but it was his shock over the assassination of Hasan al-Banna in 1949 that changed his life.

He returned to Egypt in 1950 and joined the Muslim Brotherhood as an active revolutionary against the colonial government, at a time when the Brotherhood was allied with the Free Officers Movement led by

Gamal Abdel Nasser to force the British out of Egypt and overthrow the king. It would be an ill-fated partnership.

When it occurred on July 23, 1952, the Free Officers' military coup was a sudden and successful strike. The Brotherhood and Qutb, however, soon realized that Nasser and the new government had no intention of setting up an Islamic government of the kind they proposed. In response, the Brotherhood turned its clandestine apparatus, invented by Hasan al-Banna and now inspired by Sayyid Qutb, against the new government.²² By January 1954, the Egyptian government had outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood, which continued its secret plotting. These activities came to a head on October 26, 1954, when members of the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser during a speech in Alexandria.

By this time, Nasser had placed the first figurehead president, General Muhammad Naguib, under house arrest and had become the second president of the young republic. Nasser was well on his way to becoming a charismatic Egyptian strongman as well as a world leader. Surviving the attempt on his life without injury, Nasser reacted the way Egyptian governments generally react to dire internal threats: rounding up and interrogating large numbers of Muslim Brothers or other opponents, imprisoning many and executing a few. For his part in the plotting, if not the plot, Sayyid Qutb received an initial life sentence that was later reduced to fifteen years. The future president, Anwar Sadat, oversaw the prosecution. After his conviction, Sayyid Qutb spent the rest of his life in prison, minus six months at the end, when the government released him only to rearrest him for subversive activities. He was executed on August 29, 1966. Since that time, Qutb has been considered a *shahid* (martyr) by all those following the path of violent jihad and by many others who are not.

While in prison he wrote most of the books for which he is famous today. His most popular book, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an (In the Shade of the Qur'an)*, was a scholarly

interpretation of the Holy Qur'an. Some of this longer work found its way into what has become Qutb's jihadist manifesto under the title *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq (Milestones Along the Way)*.²³ This book, smuggled out of prison, became the evidence of sedition used by the government's prosecutors at the trial that led to Qutb's execution. Sayyid Qutb was an original thinker, but he did not hesitate to borrow some basic concepts from the important Pakistani anticolonialist writer and jihadist Syed Abul A'ala Maududi (1903–1979). Maududi is the most important non-Arab influence on al-Qaeda, through the writings of his contemporary Sayyid Qutb.

One can hear echoes of Qutb's earlier musings about the lack of values in the America he visited in the dramatic opening passages of *Milestones*:

Mankind today is standing at the edge of an abyss ... not because of the threat of annihilation hanging over its head ... this is but a symptom of the disease and not the disease [itself] ... rather [it is] because of the global bankruptcy of the "values" that would enable the healthy development of human life.... This is abundantly clear in the Western World.²⁴

Qutb prefigures the views of al-Qaeda strategists half a century later when he questions the future of the Western world despite its overwhelming material and military superiority, again in the very beginnings of his *Milestones* manifesto:

Western man's leadership of the human race is on the verge of disappearing ... not because Western civilization is bankrupt materially nor from the point of view of its economic and military power being weak; rather, the Western system's period is ending because it does not have a stock of "values" to spend on leadership.²⁵

From his Egyptian prison, Sayyid Qutb asserted that a new leadership for mankind is inevitable, that only Islam has the spiritual values for that leadership, and

that only Qutb's socially strict version of Islam gives mankind true freedom. In every other system, he claims, men serve other men, with tyranny the order of the day. In Islam, he argues, men serve only Allah. To accomplish this form of freedom within human society, Islam gives humanity a unique gift, the concept of *khilafah*, or the caliphate, in which a man becomes Allah's vicar on earth and the Prophet's successor as leader of the Muslim community (but not a prophet himself, as Muhammad is considered to be the "seal" or final prophet). Within the caliphate, political units are governed by the shari'ah.²⁶

Qutb considered the West to be spiritually bankrupt long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. (He also considered communism to be a failed theory.) Qutb espoused what we might term revolutionary Salafism. His is not the gradualist approach that the Muslim Brotherhood would later adopt, although he recognizes that it would take time for Islam to become the leading force in the world. He espoused a sudden explosion, a jihad that reaches to the ends of the earth but begins at home in Egypt, the center of the traditional Arab Muslim lands. He argues that Islam is a revolution (*thawrah*) that must be based in a nation, not in some abstract ideal or argument. While ultimate victory could take a long time, the reestablishment of a Muslim community, the ummah, could come sooner according to Qutb if Muslims adopt the program he recommends.

Qutb asserts that the Muslim ummah had disappeared from the face of the earth in all but name centuries before his time. If Islam is to reassert its leadership role as the West declines, it must restore itself to its original state at the time when the original Islamic ummah of the *salaf* broke through the confines of the Arabian Peninsula and onto the world stage. At the same time, Qutb acknowledges that the distance between the position of Islam in his day and the leadership of mankind is vast. The West still has material strength on its side, and Islam must be reformed to recover its original values within the political entity of the

ummah, which could then over time provide the material largesse that only the West currently possessed.

Sayyid Qutb has a clear method in his arguments for Islamic revival. First, he describes the state of the world using a term with a long history familiar to all Muslims: *jahiliyyah*, which may be translated as “barbarism” but literally indicates a state of ignorance, in this case ignorance of the message of the revelations of Allah. In the traditional Muslim account of history, *jahiliyyah* is the state of the Arabs before they accepted the divinely inspired message of the Prophet Muhammad. As the Arabs of the Prophet’s age accepted his message, testified to the unity of Allah, and gave allegiance to Muhammad as his Messenger, they passed from *jahiliyyah* into Islam. At first, only a few submitted their lives to Allah within the structure of Islam. Violent jihad was a daily fact of life before the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula were won over to Islam. Sometimes, converted Arabs became backsliders or “hypocrites” who broke their agreements with Muhammad, and the new Muslim nation had to deal with them—mildly if they repented and harshly if they did not.

In Qutb’s view, the entire world of his time was in a state of *jahiliyyah*. What the world thought of as Muslim countries did not follow the shari’ah exclusively and thereby did not follow in the path that Allah revealed to his Messenger, Muhammad. Qutb asserted that Christians were in a state of *jahiliyyah* because of their doctrine of the Trinity and their belief that Jesus is the “Son of Allah,” both of which deny the unity of Allah and therefore deny the most basic requirement of His revelation. Similarly, Qutb claims that Jews are in a state of *jahiliyyah* because they, like the Christians, have distorted the original revelations by saying, for example, “Ezra is the Son of Allah.”²⁷ In short, the world is divided into two parts only: Islam and *jahiliyyah*. Qutb asserts that there are no Muslim countries, only Muslims, so logically this means that the entire world system is in the state of *jahiliyyah*. His mission is persuasion, however,

so he takes the time to provide arguments against the full panoply of religious communities as well as atheists.

Sayyid Qutb knew that many good and sincere Muslims of his time would be reluctant to accept his assertions and in fact were likely to disagree completely that Muslim countries with long traditions of Islamic education and culture are in fact in a state of *jahiliyyah*. Qutb borrows another concept from his Pakistani counterpart Maududi to strengthen his argument that the modern world is nothing but *jahiliyyah*, barbarism. This borrowed concept is *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty). Al-Qaeda's assertion that modern Muslim governments are apostate depends upon the arguments pressed by Sayyid Qutb concerning the doctrine of *hakimiyyah*:

The wisdom of Allah decreed: that the issue of belief be the first issue on which the [Prophet's] call would focus from the very first day of his mission; and that the Messenger's (blessing and peace be upon him) first sermon would focus on calling the people to testify "there is no god but Allah"; and that in his prophetic call [Muhammad] would introduce the people to their Lord, al-Haqq [the Truth] and make them subject to Him alone.

Looking at the matter from the outside and [using] the shrouded human mind, this [approach] would not be the easiest path to the hearts of the Arabs. But they already knew from their language the meaning of *ilah* (god) and the meaning of "there is no god but Allah." They knew that *uluhiyyah* (divinity) means sublime sovereignty. They knew that the declaration of the unity of divinity and the uniqueness of Allah (praise be unto Him) both mean stripping away authority from the priests, the tribal leaders, the commanders, and rulers and returning all [authority] to Allah, e.g., authority over hearts, places of worship, the realities of life, money, legal judgment and authority concerning life and death. The [Arabs] knew that "there is no god but Allah"

was a revolution against worldly authority that usurped the principal divine prerogatives. This was a revolution against the customs upon which this usurpation [of divine prerogatives] was based. Moreover, it was a departure from the authority that ruled by customary law (*shari'ah*),²⁸ which Allah did not sanction. It was not hidden from the Arabs—they knew their language well and they knew the true meaning of “there is no god but Allah”—what this call [to Islam] meant in relation to their customs, their rulership, and their authority. Therefore, when they received this call to Islam or rather this revolution, their reception [of the call] was harsh and they waged war against it, both high and low.²⁹

Qutb borrowed most of these terms and concepts from the Pakistani Islamist Maududi. The Egyptian's argumentation, however, is based on his own long meditation on the Holy Qur'an and the writings of its traditional commentators. According to Maududi, Islam is not a religion and jihad is not a holy war. Instead: “Islam is a revolutionary ideology and programme which seeks to alter the social order of the whole world and rebuild it in conformity with its own tenets and ideals.... And ‘Jihad’ refers to that revolutionary struggle and utmost exertion which the Islamic Party brings into play to achieve this objective.”³⁰

Qutb agrees with Maududi's formulation, although Qutb is naturally more Arab-centric and focused on Egypt first. Both men rely to a great degree on passages in the Qur'an and their own views of history. Their ideology can be termed revolutionary Salafism because it goes far beyond the classic understanding of jihad as primarily defensive and aims at overturning the modern Muslim social order on a global scale.³¹ Qutb thought of Islam as a global revolution that would replace Western capitalism and Eastern communism. When Qutb spoke of the early Muslim ummah going to war against the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, he used the word *harb*

(war), not *jihad*. Jihad includes war but is an all-inclusive struggle.

Sayyid Qutb used these concepts to spin out the milestones for his reader. If the entire world is *jahili* (ignorant), Muslims need to reject traditional jurisprudence as well as the constitutions developed by modern societies, which are in the state of *jahiliyyah*. If *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty) belongs to Allah alone, Muslims must reject all hybrid laws and constitutions. Egypt's mélange of Napoleonic code and customary Islamic law must be rejected, according to this line of thinking.

Writing from jail, Sayyid Qutb knew that he would likely not live to see what he considered the real Islamic society. He was writing for the vanguard of the new world order based on the Islamic ummah, urging violent revolution beginning in Egypt. His manifesto may be captured in the points below:

- Reject everything that partakes of *jahiliyyah* in thought or political form, whether democracy or communism
- For the most part, keep aloof from Jews and Christians
- Prepare to fight all modern “Muslim” governments
- Do not permit the sovereignty of Allah to be compromised with mixtures of other legal systems
- Return to the basic of the Islamic ancestors, the *salaf*
- Only when Muslims accept revolutionary Salafism and after they have taken control of a specific territory and people may they frame practical laws based on a strict adherence to the shari‘ah

- Ultimately, Islam will be the global Islamic ummah, which will not be a nation but a community of revolutionary Salafist countries or nations welded together by their adherence to the shari'ah and loyalty to the caliph, who will be the source of all legitimacy as successor to the Messenger of Allah

This Qutbist outline, with some strategic adjustments, is carried forward today in al-Qaeda's ideology and program, although it aims to avoid some of the mistakes made by Egyptian groups. Within violent jihadist groups, tactics and strategy may be argued, but revolutionary Salafism is not challenged. The Arab al-Qaeda, with its legacy taken from the Arabic-language writings of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, has been ensconced within the modern country of Pakistan and cooperates with Pakistani groups that are heir to the same revolutionary vision, written in Urdu and English by Maududi. The ideology predates al-Qaeda and will doubtless outlive it after al-Qaeda the organization ceases to exist in its current form.

Sayyid Qutb devoted a chapter in his *Milestones* to jihad, which he titled "Jihad on the Path of Allah." There he substitutes "jihad" for *qital* in the well-known phrase "combat on the path of Allah."³² Jihad is a far broader term than *qital* (combat). He echoes Hasan al-Banna that jihad is not defensive, although he notes that many well-intentioned Muslims make this mistake:

If we must call Islamic jihad a defensive movement, then we must change what is understood by the word "defense." Let us deem it to mean "defense of man himself" against all factors that constrict his freedom and impede his liberation. These factors take the shape of beliefs and concepts and in this way present themselves as political systems based on economic, class, or ethnic distinctions, which ruled over all the earth on the day Islam arrived and have continued to

rule in some form over the *jahili* civilization until today.

Through this broadening of what is understood by the word “defense” we are able to encounter the reality of the inducements to the Islamic explosion onto the earth through jihad and we encounter the essential nature of Islam, i.e., a call for the liberation of mankind from bondage to men. And [we encounter] the Divinity of Allah alone, and His Lordship over the universe, the destruction of the kingdom of human caprice on the earth and the establishment of the kingdom of the divine Shari‘ah in the world of mankind.

As for the attempt to create justifications of Islamic jihad in the current narrow understanding of “defensive war” and the attempt to research the traditions to confirm that the instances of Islamic jihad were purely to turn back the neighboring enemy powers from the Islamic Nation—understood by some to be the Arabian Peninsula—is an attempt that grows out of insufficient understanding of the nature of this religion and the role it came to play on the earth. It is the product of defeat by the pressure of the current reality and by the cunning Orientalist attack upon Islamic jihad.³³

Sayyid Qutb spends two chapters of his *Milestones* arguing that Islamic society alone provides the basis for proper human relations and the provision of material goods without slipping into worshipping them. He asserts that educating a sufficient number of Muslim scientists to provide for the material needs of Muslim society is a legal obligation. He even allows that as long as Muslim scientists stay away from questions already answered by Islam and stick to science, they may learn from *jahili* scientists. He is confident that a well-regulated Muslim society can avoid clashes like those between the Christian Church and Western scientists.

He then turns to the problem of nationalism, which will resonate later in al-Qaeda's program, in a chapter entitled "The Muslim's Nationality and His Belief."³⁴ Qutb asserts that Islam came to establish not only new values but also new relationships, and he points out its uniqueness:

- There is only one *hizb* (party) of Allah; all other parties belong to Satan and the Taghut (Tyrant)³⁵
- There is only one path that reaches Allah; no other leads to Him
- There is one system, and Islam is that system; any other system is *jahiliyyah*
- There is one shari'ah, the Islamic shari'ah; any other is *hawa* (caprice)
- There is one truth and no other; all else is error

At this point in his text, Sayyid Qutb introduces the ancient concept of Dar al-Islam and Dar-al-Harb, i.e., the "abode of Islam" and the "abode of war," asserting that there is only one Dar al-Islam and that all else is Dar al-Harb. Traditionally, Muslims could not wage war in Muslim lands but, especially before modern times, could raid across borders into enemy territory. Muslim armies could raid into Syria to wage jihad against Byzantine lands on the theory that the proximity of these lands to Muslims posed a threat to Muslims—not an unreasonable position for much of Islamic history. In Qutb's modern construct, however, in which there is no Muslim state, only Muslims, the whole world is Dar al-Harb and, therefore, subject to jihad. There is no Dar al-Islam, no ummah, and no caliph. There are Muslims, however, and they form what today we might call a virtual community tied together by bonds of faith.

In Sayyid Qutb's ideology, the only bonds are the bonds of Islam. People commonly think that family, tribe, or nation constitute fundamental and enduring ties, but Qutb argues that these are false unless such ties are framed within the context of Islam. Qutb sees no

problem with honoring one's parents unless there is a challenge posed to Islam inherent in that bond. Then one must turn away from one's parents. This position is very foreign to ordinary life in the Middle East and South Asia. The idea that children would defy their father on an important issue is a difficult proposition. Only a few extreme situations would allow a child to defy his parents. Qutb argues that if a parent sides with the enemies of Islam, then the child must turn away from that parent. Jihad presents a further challenge. If a proper Islamic authority calls for jihad, a son must respond if he is able. Establishing a proper authority in Sunni Islam, which recognizes no clergy or hierarchy, is challenging. When the call went out for volunteers to go on jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, this issue gained real importance. Parents in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, often did not want their young sons flying off to fight in the wilds of Afghanistan. It was not unknown for sons to seek out a religious authority to declare that jihad in Afghanistan was a personal legal obligation according to Islamic law.³⁶

What is true of the family is true of the state or tribe. It is acceptable for Egyptians to identify with Egypt only when Egypt becomes a true Islamic state. Patriotism would be licit only after jihad has removed the Taghut and after true Islamic governance according to the Islamic shari'ah alone is established. This antinationalist stance in revolutionary Salafism has carried forward to al-Qaeda. It is normal for Ayman al-Zawahiri, for example, to rail against nationalist ideology and for al-Qaeda writers and speakers to criticize local groups like Hamas, the violent Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, for being too concerned with setting up a local state. Hamas is Islamist, to be sure, but it is also a Palestinian nationalist movement dedicated to the destruction of Israel—but with no interest in global jihad—and it is therefore unacceptable to al-Qaeda. We will return to this irony when we analyze the works of al-Qaeda's strategists. For now, it is sufficient to note that al-Qaeda's most lethal enemy within the Palestinian

territories, especially Gaza, is the fellow Islamist organization Hamas. Salafism, as a theological position, does not predict political affinity without some other factor being in play.

Sayyid Qutb ends his introduction with an apology for any disjointed thought in the twelve chapters of his book. His family smuggled out the book in sections to be published in 1964 as a harbinger of his execution, and its published form preserves the appearance of a series of articles written at various times in prison. It is repetitious, but its core thought is very clear. For example, the last chapter, entitled “Hadha Huwa al-Tariq” (“This Is the Way”), delineates the milestones for his reader to be the “vanguard” that will lead the way for Islam to take its proper role as leader of the world. The concept of vanguard, a term adopted by Lenin from Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*, was one of the key terms with which al-Qaeda’s strategists were to identify its members.

The last chapter of Sayyid Qutb’s book begins with a passage from the Qur’anic Surah *al-Buruj* (*The Constellations*). This is a short, riveting story that tells the tale of the owners of a fiery trench or pit into which they throw believers for nothing more than believing in Allah. Sayyid Qutb tells his readers that this story is something upon which every Muslim, especially those that call others to Islam, should meditate. It tells the nature of the path revolutionary Salafists have chosen. At the end of his life, having suffered the tortures of prison and constant ill health, Sayyid Qutb stands defiant as a modern hero to his admirers. They see him as one who followed the example of those early believers described in *al-Buruj*, choosing execution over the betrayal of his personal belief. Qutb’s words are dramatic, perhaps a reflection of the poet and novelist he was in his early life, as he explains the story of *al-Buruj*:

This is a story of a group that believed in their Lord and proclaimed the reality of their faith. Then [this group] was exposed to a tribulation from

arrogant, tyrannical enemies [who] ridiculed the right of “Man” to freedom of belief in Truth [al-Haqq, an attribute of Allah] and of faith in Allah (the Powerful and Praiseworthy); and [they ridiculed] the dignity of Man before Allah whereupon [these believers] became a game by which the tyrants delighted in the agonies of their torture and were amused by the spectacle of their torment in the fire.

But faith lifted these hearts above the tribulation so that they did not turn away from [their] religion. Their belief triumphed over life. They were not crushed by the arrogant tyrant’s intimidation. [Instead] they burned to death in the fire.³⁷

Sayyid Qutb states that these early believers triumphed over life by breaking their bonds to it, preferring bonds only to Allah. At the same time, he recognizes that this tragic end could trouble even Muslim hearts. Qutb points out that the matter does not end with the end of the story. We are not told of the tyrant’s fate in earthly terms but only that those devoted to Allah can expect tyrants to encounter fire in the next life. Qutb points out that success, as measured in this life, does not weigh in the scale of eternity because Islam is the sole determining element. Becoming a martyr in this life will lead to eternal victory in the next. On the other hand, Qutb points out that Allah has chosen to punish some tyrants on earth. Among these is the pharaoh, the symbol of tyranny in Egypt, who is mentioned at the end of *al-Buruj*, as Qutb’s Muslim readers would know.

Sayyid Qutb ends *Milestones* with an emotional call to the beginning of a movement, which he calls the “vanguard” that will follow him after his death, which he knew was surely coming. In light of the mostly dry reasoning of the rest of the book, this passionate call was an abrupt change. The author had intended it to be inspirational as well as logical. In this he has been successful, as he is often quoted by jihadists decades

after his execution and is generally referred to as a *shahid* (martyr). His conclusions stem from his revolutionary Salafist understanding of Islam and his reading of the Pakistani Maududi.³⁸ He did not write about strategy or military or political doctrine. Instead, he took the debate about secularism and religious reform within Egyptian circles in a dramatically new direction.

Since the fall of the Turkish caliphate after World War I, Egyptians had occasionally debated whether a new caliphate was necessary and, if so, whether it should be established in Egypt. Sayyid Qutb saw the entire twentieth-century world in a state of *jahiliyyah* because, in the absence of a caliphate, no state recognized the absolute dominion of Allah, especially in terms of governance and law. The use of the twin doctrines of *jahiliyyah* and *hakimiyyah* is crucial to the ideology of al-Qaeda, which it uses to delegitimize Muslim governments. For example, Ayman al-Zawahiri attacked Pakistan's constitution in 2009, arguing that sovereignty belongs only to Allah and concluding that Pakistan is not an Islamic state despite that its constitution stipulates that it is. He further concludes, therefore, that Pakistan is subject to jihad from its own citizens and that other Muslims have an obligation to join the battle. The al-Qaeda strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and others used the same argument to justify jihad against the government of Yemen.

Sayyid Qutb, however, is not fully responsible for al-Qaeda's ideology in some of its more violent and objectionable aspects, such as the targeting of innocents or even violence against Americans and Europeans. Qutb's goal was to remove what he perceived to be tyrannical governments that were Muslim in name only, beginning with Egypt. He was mainly interested in establishing a physical ummah that would become leader of the world in the "realm of values." Sometimes, Qutb spoke of gentle persuasion. Most of all, he became the symbol of the heroic Muslim figure of the modern

age, standing up to torture and intimidation and refusing to compromise his principles, even to save his life.

Before we turn to the next major Egyptian ideologue of jihad and revolutionary Salafism, we need to look at the relationship of jihad to the achievement of the ummah in the thought of Sayyid Qutb and his followers. In its simplest use, ummah means the Muslim community, the collection of transnational Muslims who exist independently of any particular country that claims to be Muslim. The first goal of Salafist jihadists is to unite that ummah behind jihadist goals, perhaps not all at once, but piece by piece or perhaps country by country. If a number of countries could become Islamic emirates, one could speak of a loose federation of these states as the Islamic ummah. Finally, if the loose federation and the wider ummah could come together behind a caliph as a guide, the ummah would become a caliphate. In the past, caliphs have sometimes ruled, but they have also acted as religious leaders with more moral suasion than temporal power.

Some see the concept of a new caliphate or universal ummah as unlikely and perhaps far-fetched. While this reaction is understandable in the West, it is a dangerous underestimation of a serious and compelling goal to many would-be jihadist recruits. Salafist jihadists are fully aware of how difficult it would be to establish a new caliphate. They will not give up the dream, however; their ideology is dedicated to achieving the goal and restoring Islam to what they call its former glories.

ABD AL-SALAM FARAJ'S REVOLUTIONARY JIHAD

Another radical Egyptian and contemporary of Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, wrote a small book that has become a classic among violent jihadists. Often translated as *The Neglected Obligation (al-Jihad al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah)*, Faraj's book argues that jihad is an individual duty for all Muslims.³⁹ The Arabic word *gha'ibah* can be translated as "absent," "hidden," or "invisible." As Faraj develops his argument, it becomes

clear that the duty of participating in jihad is actually understood by religious scholars but that they have chosen in modern times to hide this duty from ordinary Muslims. The Arabic word *faridah* in the title means a binding legal obligation under Islamic law intended for the individual and not some generalized duty of the Muslim community. Faraj was an engineer, not a religious scholar. His hostility toward conventional religious scholars and authorities was carried forward into the ranks of al-Qaeda, and his concept of jihad has become a basic tenet of al-Qaeda's ideology.

Unlike the more complex and prolific works of Sayyid Qutb, Faraj's book is about one thing: jihad. Faraj's book assumes the arguments in Qutb's works to be established fact. In his short introduction, he states what the next twenty-seven pages will attempt to establish: "Contemporary religious scholars (*ulama'*) have neglected jihad on the path of Allah despite its utmost importance and lofty significance for the future of this religion; they ignored it despite their knowledge that this path alone is [the way] to restore and raise anew the edifice of Islam."⁴⁰

Faraj bolsters most of his arguments by citing the traditions of the Prophet and the fatwas (legal opinions) of mostly mediaeval scholars and religious authorities. Because Sunni Islam is not hierarchical, a fatwa or ruling on a matter of Islamic law by a scholar is not generally considered binding, but the opinions of highly regarded authorities can be very influential if not dispositive of an issue. Faraj refers to Ibn Taymiyyah, one of the favorite religious authorities of all violent groups associated with the al-Qaeda line of thinking.

Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) lived during the Mongol invasions of the central lands of the Middle East. As the Mongols invaded Syria, Ibn Taymiyyah was asked for his legal opinion concerning whether the Mongols, some of whom were themselves Muslims, were legal targets for jihad. In response, Ibn Taymiyyah issued a series of legal opinions, which came to be

known as the Mardin fatwas.⁴¹ Although his opinions were more nuanced than those of violent jihadists of today, he stated that the invading Mongols were not Muslim. The Mongol army when it was on the march followed Yassa law, an apparently straightforward and draconian military law for which the basic punishment was death. Ibn Taymiyyah argued that if a group or nation did not follow shari'ah exclusively, they could not be considered Muslims. Further, because the Mongols were then invading Muslim lands, jihad against them was not only allowed—it was obligatory. One of the basic questions prompting the Mardin fatwas was whether the city of Mardin could be attacked by Muslims since Muslims lived there in addition to the Mongol invaders and others.

The story of Mardin might be seen as an esoteric story about a medieval Muslim theologian or a bit of obscure history—until one thinks of the Twin Towers and the ordinary Muslims working there on the day Bin Laden's assassins, led by the Egyptian Muhammad Atta, killed them. The story of the Mardin fatwas, as reconstructed by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Faraj and the al-Qaeda ideologues who followed him, in this context becomes a modern story.

In Faraj's view, Muslim rulers in his day did not follow the shari'ah any more than the Mongol invaders had in the Middle Ages. It follows, therefore, that Muslims in the modern era have the same obligation to fight their rulers that ancient Muslims had when faced with invading Mongol armies. The Mongol armies became a metaphor often encountered in al-Qaeda's writings and pronouncements: modern Western armies are equated with the ancient Mongol armies that overthrew the Muslim caliphate of their day.

Faraj was not writing for the scholars of Islamic law at al-Azhar. Lacking a formal religious education, he was not one of them, and they would not have listened to his arguments nor even recognized his authority to make them. He was writing for those who had not studied

Islamic law in any great depth but were dissatisfied with the state of Egyptian society and perhaps humiliated by what they saw as Sadat's capitulation to foreign pressure to make peace with Israel. He takes his time quoting Ibn Taymiyyah and other famous, ancient commentators on the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet. He finds it necessary to supply a modern Arabic word for his readers when he apparently judges that the medieval vocabulary might not be understood. However arcane his argument might seem in the West, it was compelling to a hardcore few in Egypt of his day, just as it is to many more within al-Qaeda's global network today. Al-Qaeda and its affiliates make the same claims today whether they are talking about Pakistan, Yemen, or Egypt. A number of modern Muslim scholars have argued that Faraj, the engineer, misinterpreted Ibn Taymiyyah's thought, but al-Qaeda and its sympathizers dismiss their views.⁴²

Rejecting the Muslim Brotherhood after Sayyid Qutb's death, Faraj joined a group called Jama'ah al-Jihad (The Jihad Group).⁴³ Then, about the time he wrote his book, he formed a clandestine group, often referred to as al-Jihad, and began preparations that ultimately led to the assassination of Anwar Sadat. Ayman al-Zawahiri was associated with the same group and was imprisoned after the assassination, but he escaped execution and left Egypt after his imprisonment. Al-Zawahiri, as he joined Bin Laden for jihad against the Soviet Union's forces in Afghanistan, carried with him the conclusions that Faraj had reached. We will hear these conclusions applied again and again by violent jihadist leaders against the United States, its European allies, and especially Muslim governments that do not adhere to al-Qaeda's ideology.

Extremist Muslim groups often speak of the "near enemy" and the "far enemy." The followers of al-Qaeda's line in the twenty-first century believe their first priority is to battle the "far enemy," now considered to be the United States and its European allies. If the United

States can be defeated, according to their reasoning, the near enemy, consisting of all “apostate” Muslim governments and Israel, would fall easily. Faraj, writing in the beginning of the 1980s, considered the first priority to be the Arab governments beginning with the largest and most powerful of them all: Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood during the ascendancy of Sayyid Qutb split into two wings: one that followed Qutb’s call for revolution and one that counseled patience and a gradualist approach. The goals of these two wings were identical, but their strategy and tactics were very far apart. Faraj had no patience for the more pacifist faction in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and many of the straw men he attacks represent majority Muslim Brotherhood positions.

Faraj addresses eight nonviolent alternatives to his radical, violent approach to establishing the modern caliphate based on jihad. He prefaces these eight alternatives with the rhetorical question: “But there are opinions within Islamic jurisprudence about the removal of those rulers—to what extent are these opinions sound?” These alternatives are:

1. Charitable societies
2. Obedience, education, abundance of devotional acts
3. Striving to high rank within society
4. Preaching to establish a broad base
5. Emigration (*hijra*)
6. Seeking knowledge
7. Liberating Jerusalem before the defeat of the near enemy
8. Considering jihad as defensive only

These alternatives represent a gradualist path to establishing an Islamic government. It is not that Faraj or al-Qaeda thinks the Muslim Brotherhood’s goals are wrong; rather, they question the sincerity of the

Brotherhood's intentions and the effectiveness of its program in establishing an Islamic state.

For example, Faraj thinks that charitable societies and teaching good works, including following the duties of a good Muslim, simply will not lead to the establishment of an Islamic state. As for the man who avoids jihad and confines himself to devotions, Faraj claims that such a person is either ignorant about Islam, i.e., not a Muslim at all, or he is a coward. Similarly, trying to influence a state like Egypt by striving to achieve high positions in that state is a dead end and will not achieve the goal of transforming Egypt into a true Muslim state. Though some argue that preaching is necessary to prepare others for jihad, Faraj dismisses preaching that does not call clearly for jihad and argues that achieving a broad, popular base has nothing to do with establishing the caliphate or an Islamic state. He is somewhat more nuanced with those who might want to leave Egypt and return as conquerors at some later date, but in the end he implies that this might be avoiding the main issue for him, which is transforming Egypt into a powerful jihadist state.⁴⁴

Faraj states that it is every Muslim's duty to liberate Jerusalem and the "holy lands." However, he needs to respond to those who would argue that the holy lands are the proper field for jihad. Faraj does not want Egyptians to turn away from revolution against their own government while dreaming about "liberating" Jerusalem. He argues that the believer is expected to be prudent and seek the best solution, and a quixotic plan against Israel at the time was not prudent. Faraj makes three points in this regard:

1. Fighting the near enemy is better than fighting the far enemy
2. If Muslim blood must be shed, Muslims should shed it for the right reasons and not for the nationalist schemes of apostate rulers of states that only appear to be Islamic

3. Removing colonialism is a waste of time; Muslims need to concentrate on setting up an Islamic state in “our countries” first and make the word of Allah the highest thing there⁴⁵

He concludes by restating that the proper field of jihad is removing apostate governments and replacing them with the “perfect Islamic system.”

Faraj also needs to dispense with the widely held belief that jihad is for defense only. Both Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb argued against this as a false doctrine. The challenge for Faraj and for all violent jihadists is the premise of ordinary Muslims that Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic word for Islam comes from the same root as peace (*s-l-m*), for example, and this root appears about three times more frequently in the Holy Qur’an than the root of jihad. Faraj does not deny this but is not deterred from arguing that one verse, called the “verse of the sword,” abrogates all verses that argue that Muslims should live in peace with non-Muslims. This verse begins: “Then when the sacred months are over, kill the idolaters wherever you find them.”⁴⁶ Faraj quotes several scholars of the Qur’an to argue that the verse of “the sword” abrogates over one hundred verses about peace spread among some forty-eight Surahs. He argues that violent jihad is a centerpiece of Islam, even in the modern period, and concludes that it is an individual legal obligation for every Muslim because it is the only way to establish the caliphate—the genuine Islamic state—anew. The corollary to this is the obligation to kill apostates and non-Muslims wherever they are found, beginning with local regimes.

SAUDI ARABIA: PARALLEL SALAFIST DEVELOPMENT

When Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri developed the mature form of their global jihadist doctrine based on the revolutionary Salafism championed by Sayyid Qutb, they brought together similar Egyptian and Saudi Arabian strains of Salafism.

We have briefly outlined the radical Egyptian version that both men came to adopt and develop. We shall examine the strategic changes they made to accommodate that core Egyptian ideology to what Abu Bakr Naji calls “the current of Jihadist Salafism.”⁴⁷ Al-Qaeda’s strategy and doctrine are not the same as Sayyid Qutb’s, and their concept of jihad is not the same as what Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj championed. They are Sayyid Qutb’s “vanguard.” They absorbed his thought and that of Abd al-Salam Faraj, then moved beyond it to the global stage.

Sayyid Qutb’s thought influenced Osama Bin Laden while he was still living in Saudi Arabia. He read the works of Sayyid Qutb and his brother Muhammad Qutb before he met al-Zawahiri.⁴⁸ Yet before encountering any of these influences, Bin Laden was heir to the dominant form of Salafism in Saudi Arabia among Sunni citizens, the teachings of the reformer Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, whose doctrine is often referred to as Wahhabism. This expression is generally not used by Saudis themselves, however, and is considered a pejorative term. Wahhabism or Saudi Salafism contains many factions that in recent history have emphatically disagreed with one another on such issues as jihad and the nature of the Saudi state itself. Nevertheless, we need to take a brief look at the origins of what has become known as “Wahhabism” to understand the social background to Osama Bin Laden’s operations. Wahhabism did not so much influence al-Qaeda as it provided the fertile ground in which the seeds of revolutionary Salafism could be planted.

By all contemporary accounts, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was a formidable scholar and personality who pursued religious studies in Mecca, Medina, and southern Iraq. He was born in 1703 in a small village in the Najd in what is now central Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian Salafist reformer Muhammad Abduh may be considered on the “liberal” end of Salafism; Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is definitely on the conservative end.

He is perhaps closer to Sayyid Qutb, but their concerns and legacy are quite different. Sayyid Qutb was mainly concerned with creating the revolutionary form of Salafism that would allow pious Muslims to engage in jihad against the near enemy, starting with what he viewed as the apostate Egyptian government. He knew he could not personally achieve more than leaving his thought to a “vanguard” of the “ummah-to-come.” Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was able to bestow his austere form of Islam on the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula because of his alliance with the founder of the original Saudi state, Muhammad Ibn Saud.⁴⁹ Al-Wahhab’s aims were to reform Islam as he witnessed it in practice in his own lifetime by preaching a return to the ancient ways of the Prophet Muhammad and his earliest followers, but he was not a revolutionary.

At the time Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab began his career as a religious reformer and preacher in his home village of Uyaynah, the Arabian Peninsula was far from united. There were great nomadic tribal confederations and settled dwellers in oases in an otherwise desiccated environment. An oasis governor or emir had little authority beyond his immediate vicinity. One would expect a governor to welcome a returning educated man to the place of his birth, and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, even with his reformist message, was welcome when he returned from his studies. The welcome grew strained, however, as his austere ways irritated the local inhabitants, and was lost entirely when he caused a woman accused of fornication or perhaps adultery to be stoned in public, a method of punishment that, although sanctioned, was apparently out of favor at the time. This may have been the triggering event that caused the leaders of the Banu Khalid tribe (based in the eastern part of the peninsula but whose power extended to Uyaynah) to seek the execution of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The emir of Uyaynah, no doubt constrained by local custom, refused to comply and chose to exile Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his family instead,

an act that would likely have meant the reformer's death were he not to find a new protector.

In 1744, the exiled religious leader found that protector forty miles from his home village in another oasis "emirate" called Dir'iyyah, governed by Muhammad Ibn Saud. The meeting between these two men formed the basis of the partnership between their two families that remains the basis for legitimacy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia today.

What was the message of reform that al-Wahhab developed? Like Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab meditated on the writings and tradition of Ibn Taymiyyah. Like Qutb, he emphasized the importance of jihad, as reflected in the iconic first meeting he had with Muhammad Ibn Saud. The rest of his message was to strip Islam of the trappings it had accumulated over the centuries since the Prophet by concentrating on the basics, or the pillars, of Islam. His most important emphasis was a fundamentalist interpretation of the declaration of the unity of Allah, the *tawhid*. All Muslims believe in the unity of Allah, but Ibn Abd al-Wahhab preached that any innovation since the earliest times of Islam amounted to polytheism. For this reason, he would argue that the Sufis who followed the tradition of Islamic mysticism, with its tendency to pantheism, and the Shi'ah, with their tendency to venerate saints and have rituals associated with their tombs, are both nonbelievers. He also argued, like Sayyid Qutb, that Jews and Christians had both strayed from a belief in the unity of Allah. Essentially, any group that did not follow Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's purified version of Islam was considered infidel and was a potential object of jihad.

This message of purified Islam was harsh and austere and had the fire of reforming fervor. It caught on among the tribesmen and allowed Ibn Saud to unify most of the Arabian Peninsula between Yemen and Iraq, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. With this decision, the newly formed Saudi state overstepped the

bounds of its power. Following Saudi raids into Iraq and other actions that challenged the authority of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish sultan asked Egypt to solve the problem. Egypt complied by sending an expeditionary army into the Arabian Peninsula, destroying the Saudi state and, in 1818, sending its leader to Istanbul, where he was beheaded.

The Saudi family made a second attempt to establish a state between 1824 until 1891, when it fell to a rival family, Al Rashid. The current Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was finally established in 1932, when Ibn Saud's forces, with material support from the British and in partnership with the descendants of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab intact, unified the territory of the modern kingdom. Internal jihad was complete. The British (whose interests were to the north) did not encourage expansion in that direction. The Saudi forces were never able to crack the hard nut of the tribes of Yemen and its formidable terrain. In the absence of a caliph, the king of Saudi Arabia began to style himself the protector of the two holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina and over time took on a leadership role in the wider Muslim arena. Violent jihad necessarily became what is now referred to as classic jihad, the defense of Muslim territory from non-Muslim powers and spreading the call of Salafist Islam to non-Muslim lands. Forming an alliance with the newest world power, the United States, the kingdom became wealthy and relatively secure from external threats. At the same time, underneath the modernizing surface of the kingdom pockets of Salafist zeal still burned brightly. It was this zeal that al-Qaeda was to manipulate to raise troops and money for its new concept of jihad first against the Soviet Union, then the United States, and finally against the kingdom itself.

The Wahhabi version of Salafism is at odds with al-Qaeda in a number of key aspects. For example, the concept of jihad in Saudi Arabia falls along classic lines, not the revolutionary lines of al-Qaeda often referred to as global jihad.⁵⁰ At the same time, there is a theological

overlap that al-Qaeda uses in its propaganda. The kingdom blunted classic Qutbist criticism of modern states by declaring the Qur'an as its constitution, thus placing the law revealed by Allah above human law. As we have seen, the driving force behind Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's reformist ideas was his emphasis on a pure concept of *tawhid*, the declaration of the absolute unity of Allah. The Saudi state is as much the protector of this Salafist tradition as it is the protector of the two holiest places in Islam, Mecca and Medina. The leaders of al-Qaeda often find occasion to declare support for *tawhid*, and websites supporting al-Qaeda emphasize *tawhid*.⁵¹ To an analyst in the West, such usages may be of little interest, but they signify to a pious Muslim with Salafist beliefs that the organization putting out this information shares important religious beliefs.

An example of how the concept of *tawhid* can be used by al-Qaeda for propaganda is an interview given, presumably inside Yemen, by the Yemeni-American Anwar al-Awlaki, which aired in May 2010.⁵² It demonstrates how al-Qaeda manipulates Salafist vocabulary and concepts to influence its Arabic-language audience in the Arabian Peninsula and the broader Arab world. Awlaki, who was born in New Mexico of Yemeni parents, spoke American-accented English as well as Arabic and was a powerful tool for al-Qaeda outreach to Americans and other English speakers. The May 2010 interview is intended for Sunni audiences primarily in Yemen but could be viewed in Saudi Arabia and other Arabic-speaking communities as well. The interviewer asks al-Awlaki whether he supports the "operations" of Nidal Hassan and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, even if ordinary civilians are killed. Awlaki responds that Nidal Hassan was a good Muslim and an American soldier who turned against America because of its crimes against Muslims and was therefore perfectly justified in killing American soldiers in Fort Hood, Texas, on their way to Iraq and Afghanistan because he was defending Muslims by that very act. In the case of the young Nigerian who attempted to blow up a plane over

Detroit on Christmas Day, Awlaki takes a slightly different tack. He states that America is responsible for millions of deaths of Muslim women and children, so the few people who might have been killed on that plane would have been but a drop in the ocean in comparison.

In response to the general question about the legitimacy of killing innocent civilians, al-Awlaki replies that the term “civilians” is being used a lot today, but he prefers to use the terms of the Islamic jurists and refer to “combatants” and “noncombatants.” Islamic law forbids attacks on noncombatants. Al-Awlaki uses tortured logic to show that all Americans are combatants because they voted in their leaders, who support wars against Muslims. Al-Awlaki refers to Ayman al-Zawahiri during the interview to signal clearly where his sympathies lie and includes references to America’s support of Israel against the Palestinians. Many of his statements are versions of standard al-Qaeda arguments, which might not convince ordinary Muslims, but then he pivots to a higher ground. He states that America’s “battle” is not against Palestine, or Iraq, or Afghanistan—no, the battle is against monotheism (*tawhid*). So, America’s war is not really against al-Qaeda; it is against the very essence of Islam itself. This is an argument that many Muslims might be ready to accept in an atmosphere of war, even though Americans, far from supporting a war against Islam or any religion, are overwhelmingly ignorant of the terms al-Awlaki is using. Awlaki also uses another al-Qaeda tactic by emphasizing that he is supporting defensive jihad, which sounds like the classic jihad that many Muslims support.

Awlaki may appear to be an authentic preacher to his English-speaking audience, but his Arabic does not have the rich, clear Arabic cadences and command of the religious content of a preacher with years of Islamic education. He argued that America is trying to liberalize and democratize Islam to produce a false Islam. He states that when he was in America, he was free to say what he wanted and that Muslims were freer than they

are in “Muslim countries.” He is obviously aware that much of his Arabic-speaking audience already believes that Muslims living in the United States, even if they have complaints, enjoy a relatively good status. This is a tremendously powerful concept. Awlaki cites the status of Muslims in America and dismisses it as a propaganda ploy by the American government. One suspects that much of Awlaki’s audience would need more than his words to be convinced.

Al-Qaeda has not been successful in its attempts to radicalize the Sunni population of Saudi Arabia or the population of Yemen. For example, the Saudi government itself provided the information that allowed the international community to find and defuse al-Qaeda bombs on commercial cargo planes destined for the United States in November 2010. Saudi officials were able to do this without fear of public backlash. Al-Qaeda strategists tend to see the official Salafist religious authorities in Saudi Arabia as betrayers and opponents, but those same authorities are generally respected by ordinary Sunni Muslims inside Saudi Arabia. In the long run, educated Salafist opposition to al-Qaeda’s ideology is one of the most powerful weapons against its form of Salafist jihadism referred to as global jihad, and the economic, political, and religious freedom enjoyed by America’s Muslim population is a living example that refutes al-Qaeda’s theory that the United States is at war with Islam.

Two

The Leadership Inspires a New Strategy

Guerrilla war = revolutionary war: the extension of politics by means of armed conflict. Until this much is properly understood by those who would oppose it, nothing else about it can be understood and no strategy or tactics to suppress it can prevail.

—Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea*

OSAMA BIN LADEN AND AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI: LEADERS OF THE REVOLUTION

Osama Bin Laden founded al-Qaeda, the first organization dedicated to global jihad, in 1988, the same year that the Soviet Union began pulling its troops out of Afghanistan.¹ Al-Qaeda at that time had approximately thirty members, a far cry from the reportedly six thousand Arabs who came to the region between 1987 and 1993 or the three thousand Arabs who fought against the Soviet occupation.² The call to jihad against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan had appealed to the conscience of the collective Muslim community; it was uncertain whether Bin Laden would be as successful with his new organization. From this small beginning, however, Bin Laden, with the help of al-Zawahiri, built al-Qaeda into an international terrorist brand that has engaged the United States and its allies across the globe. Al-Qaeda began a series of attacks against Americans and established its trademark by bombing U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS *Cole* in 2000, culminating in the attacks of 9/11.

After 9/11 and the fierce counterattacks by the United States, the al-Qaeda organization morphed into three separate parts of a new al-Qaeda system: al-Qaeda Central, containing the leadership cadre and its immediate advisors to provide guidance and propaganda; the system of affiliates or franchises that engage in regional overt guerrilla warfare in service of the global war against the United States and its allies; and widely dispersed clandestine cells and individual terrorists acting alone against al-Qaeda's enemies. The international security system has inflicted severe losses on al-Qaeda and disrupted it to a great degree. Any al-Qaeda success is the result of the power of its ideology and strategy. Its strategy, based on communist revolutionary strategy developed by Mao Tse-tung, refuses to accept defeat as long as any of its members are alive and fighting for their goals. Its ideology, based on a radical concept of violent jihad, defines defeat as compromise with "infidels" and views military defeat as mere setbacks. Thus, when congratulations are handed out for Western successes against al-Qaeda, a note of caution is advisable. From a very small beginning, the idea of al-Qaeda pursued by those dedicated to a jihadist war of the weak against the strong has cost the world trillions of dollars in security costs and the loss of thousands of lives. As long as al-Qaeda's ideology and strategy are viable, the threat remains alive.

The story of Osama Bin Laden's life does not need to be repeated here, but a few details will help us understand the ideology and strategy he adopted and developed. The founding of al-Qaeda not only signaled Bin Laden's desire to move beyond Afghanistan to the global arena; it also represented a growing estrangement from his mentor, the more famous (at that time) Palestinian Abdullah Azzam. Bin Laden and Azzam had enjoyed a long and successful jihad as leaders of the Services Agency (Maktab al-Khidamat) through which the two men had supported the Afghan tribal war against the Soviet Union. On November 24, 1989, Abdullah Azzam, the man who had cheated death during

the jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, was assassinated by a car bomb attack in Peshawar. This assassination altered the balance of power within the Afghan Arab community: it strengthened the Egyptian contingent led by Ayman al-Zawahiri against that of the Palestinian Azzam, the jihadist hero who had a hand in forming Hamas. In effect, Azzam's death left the field clear for al-Qaeda to develop a strong global agenda as opposed to a nationalistic, localized jihad as represented by Hamas, whose focus is entirely on destroying Israel and creating an Islamic Palestinian state.³ A more important factor in the rift between the mentor and his protégé was the fact that Azzam opposed attacking Muslim governments, whereas Bin Laden initially supported the overthrow of at least the governments of Yemen and Egypt and eventually all Muslim governments considered to be apostate. As events would unfold, al-Qaeda became not so much an organization that controls a terrorist network as a movement that incites, sometimes coordinates, and sometimes supports franchise organizations to attack U.S. interests and its local allies. As we shall see, this evolution was more the product of necessity than part of Bin Laden's original plan.

After the war against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia. His stay was not a happy one. In 1990, the Saudi royal family dismissed out of hand his offer to lead a jihad to push the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Later, Bin Laden was disgusted to witness the government's invitation to the United States to come to Kuwait's rescue from bases inside Saudi Arabian territory. As he made his objections known, Bin Laden became increasingly unwelcome in his home country and went into exile in the Sudan in 1992, to offer his considerable talents and money to help develop the Islamist state there; he also spent time conspiring with various jihadist terrorist groups against perceived enemies.

The Saudi Arabian government, besieged by complaints about Bin Laden's terrorist activities by Yemen, Algeria, and especially Egypt, revoked his citizenship in 1994. The Sudanese government had been happy to take Bin Laden's money and actively encouraged the gathering of representatives of various violent jihadist groups in Khartoum, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad. However, Sudan eventually found the Saudi's terrorist schemes a liability, especially when the United States joined the regional pressure to curtail Bin Laden's activities. Expelled from Sudan, Bin Laden returned to Pakistan and Afghanistan, where, in 1996, he issued his extraordinary call to jihad against the United States, the leader of what he termed the "Judeo-Crusader alliance."⁴ He cited many grievances, but the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia is emphasized as the most notable and most recent in the list. As time passed, Bin Laden began to support government overthrow in Saudi Arabia, a position that finally became an obsession.

The man who was to become Bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of the violent Egyptian Islamic Jihad, had been associated with Bin Laden over the years in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sudan. Al-Zawahiri served as Bin Laden's personal physician and shared the dangers and privations of the war in Afghanistan with him. The two men shared the same goals and came to depend upon each other, although Bin Laden was the leader in every sense. At the same time, he had every reason to respect al-Zawahiri and value his advice. Al-Zawahiri is a brilliant man who has studied and thought about jihad almost his entire life. Like Bin Laden, he gave up a life of conventional success and good fortune to sacrifice for his ideals. Michael Scheuer has argued persuasively that many of Bin Laden's ideas were formed before he met al-Zawahiri.⁵ It seems likely that Bin Laden's ideas were already formed in Saudi Arabia as a young man and were further shaped by experience in Afghanistan. There is no reason to doubt that the two men formed a

friendship based on shared ideals, agreement on priorities, and trust built on shared experience. When al-Zawahiri first met Bin Laden in Pakistan during the Afghan jihad, the perennially broke Egyptian no doubt needed Bin Laden more than Bin Laden needed him. At the same time, al-Zawahiri was a prolific thinker, speaker, and writer who served Bin Laden well, including assisting him in the development of what has become known as “global jihad,” which became synonymous with the name al-Qaeda.

Having joined Egyptian jihadist circles at an early age, al-Zawahiri spent his adult life working for the overthrow of the Egyptian government, culminating in his imprisonment for complicity in the assassination of Anwar Sadat.⁶ Upon his release from jail, he left Egypt to work in Saudi Arabia and then went on to Pakistan in 1985, where he gravitated to Bin Laden.⁷ After the Afghan war, al-Zawahiri joined Bin Laden in Sudan and was deeply involved in plotting the terrorist activities that resulted in Bin Laden’s becoming persona non grata in his own homeland.

After the Sudanese expelled al-Zawahiri in 1995 for executing two young boys recruited against him by the Egyptian intelligence services, he set out to rekindle the fires of jihad in Central Asia.⁸ It was not until 1998, after his arrest by the Russians in Dagestan and subsequent release, that the Egyptian rejoined Bin Laden in Pakistan/Afghanistan. Both men had failed at jihad in their own countries and had failed to establish a base in Africa or elsewhere. Each for his own reasons returned to the scene of their success against the Soviet Union. On February 23, 1998, the two men announced the new “World Islamic Front of Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders” from their redoubt in the Hindu Kush.⁹ The al-Qaeda of 1988 was transformed into the organizational base of the 9/11 attacks and all that followed after.

The violent transnational jihadist movement known as al-Qaeda is the marriage of Egyptian Islamist radicalism

and the tribal fanaticism of the Wahhabi homeland in the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁰ In the twenty-first century, these two offshoots of separate traditions have taken root in the soil of Southwest Asia as a virtual jihad central and were mirrored in al-Qaeda's leadership until Bin Laden's death. It is ironic but not unusual that both men, who regularly appeal to the frustrated aspirations, humiliations, and resentments of a generation of Arabs and other Muslims, are the products of highly successful families in their own very different cultures.

Both men, like the movement they established, were steeped in a shared narrative of the history of the modern Middle East that traces almost all the ills of the region to the conspiracies of the British, French, and American "crusaders" and their companions in arms, the Jews, from World War I to the present. Both men adopted the most radical form of Salafist Islam and consider any Muslim-majority government that cooperates with the West to be apostate.¹¹ Both men supported the overthrow of the governments of their home countries and considered U.S. power and presence in the Middle East to be the key obstacle to the achievement of their goals. Neither man received a diploma from an Islamic religious school; accordingly, neither man was schooled in the traditional religious sciences that would make them recognized religious authorities.¹² Rather, their influence seems to stem from their notoriety as symbols of resistance first to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and then to the United States and its allies throughout the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

Both men were responsible for forging the military doctrine and the political-military strategy that this book describes. Their approaches to their common enterprise were as different as their personalities. Bin Laden was the intuitive, charismatic figure who inspired his core constituency to suffer and die in the attempt to make his vision of the world a reality. He was both humble and polite and apparently driven by a grand vision of himself

as the leader of a global movement not only to restore the glories of Islam but to extend its reach beyond anything that had existed previously, by defeating the greatest military power the world had ever known. He was more strategist than operational leader, making decisions and setting policy. He was able to mediate between difficult and even explosive personalities. The image of Bin Laden as the dupe of powerful personalities and intellects of the men around him seems utterly false.¹³ From his writings and video lectures, al-Zawahiri appears more academic than intuitive and more polemicist than peacemaker and coalition builder. He appears faithful to Bin Laden, who often relied on al-Zawahiri to publicize major decisions. We can safely conclude that after 9/11, al-Zawahiri's messages continued to reflect Bin Laden's overall strategy, even as al-Qaeda's leader often remained in silent seclusion, attempting to influence events through messages saved on thumb drives and smuggled by his courier.

After Bin Laden's death, much was made about the unsuitability of al-Zawahiri to become the leader of al-Qaeda. One of the reasons given is that al-Zawahiri's real priority is Egypt rather than the more global aspirations of the al-Qaeda movement. While it is clear that al-Zawahiri spent most of his life before 1985 plotting the overthrow of the Egyptian government, once he joined Bin Laden in declaring war on the United States in 1996 he became fully committed to the global task of fighting the "far enemy."¹⁴ Moreover, al-Zawahiri himself argued as late as July 2010 that Egypt was unsuitable for guerrilla warfare, which kept him from proposing it as a priority target for al-Qaeda after 9/11.¹⁵ Al-Zawahiri also argued in 2010 that the "jihadist movement" inside Egypt had been a failure over the last forty years and could not succeed for several generations.¹⁶ As we shall see in [chapter 4](#), the strategist Abu Bakr Naji listed Egypt as one of the states that required outside intervention to establish an al-Qaeda-style emirate, a position Naji would not have taken without al-Zawahiri's concurrence.

TOWARD A POST-9/11 STRATEGY

The world of jihadist strategic studies awakened after 9/11, when al-Qaeda and its affiliates and allies were forced to deal with the major miscalculation its leadership had made with respect to American power. Al-Qaeda's leaders vastly underestimated the military power of the United States and America's ability to organize an international security regime of formidable proportions to target jihadist activities in every sphere, from finances to communications. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri believed that Afghan Arab jihadists had played a major role in the defeat of Soviet forces in Afghanistan and the ultimate downfall of the Soviet Union. The strategist Abu Bakr Naji described the conventional wisdom before 9/11: Soviet forces were much more powerful than the American military and much more prepared to take casualties and endure hardships. If jihadists could defeat the Soviet Union, did they believe they could defeat the United States using much the same strategy, doctrine, and tactics learned in Afghanistan and honed in the operations that followed?¹⁷ The major requirement of success from al-Qaeda's perspective was to goad the United States to invade Afghanistan, to mire it in the same quagmire that had defeated the powerful Soviet Union. The Afghan Arabs tended to dismiss the technical help the United States gave the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, perhaps because that help was filtered through the Pakistanis and perhaps because they needed to believe that they had never relied on the United States. So, these men were shocked when the United States quickly mounted a killing strike on the Taliban government and a worldwide attack on al-Qaeda. The initial American success devastated al-Qaeda. Unprepared to change their doctrine, they had to adjust their strategy. The first task, however, was to convince their own skeptical members, potential members, and allies that the United States was not all powerful and impossible to defeat. Ayman al-Zawahiri began to signal a strategic adjustment in the first edition of his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*.¹⁸

KNIGHTS UNDER THE PROPHET'S BANNER

In 2001, Ayman al-Zawahiri was forced into hiding, providing him with the time and a unique motivation to write a book to inform jihadists how they should proceed in the face of America's counterattack. Unlike other strategists such as al-Suri or Abu Bakr Naji, Ayman al-Zawahiri was at the top of the decision-making apparatus of al-Qaeda. In his book *The Search for Al-Qaeda*, Bruce Riedel begins his review of the major figures within al-Qaeda with Ayman al-Zawahiri, whom the author dubs "the thinker." Riedel asserts, furthermore, that al-Zawahiri is "the ideological brains behind the war launched against America on September 11, 2001."¹⁹ After the fall of the Taliban and the flight of al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri acted as the ideological trailblazer for Abu Bakr Naji, al-Suri, and a handful of other key jihadist figures in writing what he hoped would be a definitive legacy for other jihadists to follow. Like al-Suri, he knew he was being pursued and had no reason to believe that he would escape indefinitely from being killed or captured. The opening of the first edition of his book *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* begins in a similar vein to al-Suri's last works. Uncertain whether he will live to see the end of the project, he is writing both as a legacy and encouragement to others: "This book was written in the attempt to revive the consciousness of the Muslim ummah concerning its role, its obligation, what has been ordained for it and its importance, as well as the extent of the Neo-Crusaders' hostility and the necessity of understanding the difference between enemies and protectors."²⁰

The first edition of *Knights* appeared in 2001 in the form of a partial English translation. Al-Zawahiri denied having authorized its publication and complained that the text had been edited with sections deleted from his original draft. He was also annoyed that he had not had the chance to check facts, revise the text, and vet it with others before it entered into public view. He is protective of his reputation and recognizes that small mistakes

could become important indictments of him and his message, especially in the Arabic-speaking Muslim community.

During their fugitive status in the early days after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda members often wrote without benefit of notes or peer review. This fact is cited by a number of these writers, including al-Zawahiri. When these men have the time, they are fastidious about their written words, keenly aware that they are writing for history and that they will be judged by their enemies, so they generally inform readers of any extraordinary circumstances surrounding the production of their books. When they are in a relatively stable safe haven, they tell the reader the level of care they have taken to produce exactly the message that they intend. For example, in his monograph *The Morning and the Lamp*, al-Zawahiri tells readers that he vetted his work with the noted al-Qaeda ideologues Abu Yahya al-Libi and Louis Atiyatullah.²¹ Al-Zawahiri, like other al-Qaeda authors, does not hesitate to give colleagues credit, not so much as a courtesy but to demonstrate the care that has gone into the production of the book or monograph.

Approximately eight years after the unauthorized English translation appeared, al-Zawahiri authorized the publication of *Knights*¹ on the jihadist website Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad. The editors of the website introduce the book by describing what they call an “open meeting” with al-Zawahiri, which from the context seems to have been conducted by e-mail or some other electronic means rather than in person, which would have been extremely difficult, given security concerns and practical considerations. The editors quote al-Zawahiri:

After I wrote my book *Knights Under the Prophets Banner* (Allah bless him and grant him salvation!), the newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* obtained it from American intelligence services, which had obtained it from my computer in Afghanistan. Then, [the newspaper] fabricated a false story about [how] it obtained [the text], introduced its

own comments into it and then suppressed a large part of [the book] specifically related to Egypt and the Saudis. But the complete text has come to me from the information network and now I am preparing the second edition, which I hope Allah helps me complete in the near future.²²

The newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* had stated that a “fundamentalist” close to al-Zawahiri smuggled the document out of Afghanistan to Peshawar, Pakistan, and then to London. The editors do insert their own comments into the text but mostly to give context to the book, naming “fundamentalists” in London as unidentified sources of their information. The newspaper states that al-Zawahiri chose to surface the text, which he denies. The differences between the text he authorized and the one translated by *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* do not seem substantive. The newspaper does not claim to have the final text, and it presents only excerpts from the book.²³ Al-Zawahiri claims to have the full text of the book that he wrote as a basis for his approved edition, but it is not clear how he obtained it.²⁴ In any case, Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, al-Zawahiri’s authorized publisher, is convinced that the basis of *Knights1* is a copy of his original and not one that passed through American intelligence services.

Much of *Knights1* explains the course of the jihadist uprisings in Egypt and al-Zawahiri’s own activities there, through his leadership role in the radical Egyptian Islamic Jihad group and beyond. It amply describes Egypt as central to al-Zawahiri’s thinking and motivation. He bristles at any compromise with the government of Egypt or participation in democratic processes in Egypt or elsewhere. He particularly opposes Egyptian radical groups that renounce violence under pressure from the Egyptian government, which according to his revolutionary ideology is to renounce jihad.

His earlier book *The Bitter Harvest* and a number of other public statements had excoriated the Muslim Brotherhood along these lines for its activities since its

inception in 1928. Many otherwise sympathetic to al-Qaeda saw his vitriolic treatment of this oldest and most successful Islamist group and his jabs at other more radical groups as excessive. West Point's Harmony Database contains a letter written by al-Suri that states that al-Zawahiri regretted writing *The Bitter Harvest* and that he had rushed in composing it.²⁵ Al-Zawahiri's reported expression of regret for his excesses or inaccuracies is hardly convincing, especially since *Knights*¹ repeats much of the criticism of *The Bitter Harvest* of 1991. The most he offers is a correction or two, which do not change his overarching criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood or its initiative to renounce violence. In fact, nonviolent Islamists like the current Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are among the greatest threat to al-Qaeda's ideology. As Zawahiri admits, the Muslim Brotherhood is the largest Islamist group and has spread to many countries in the West as well as the Middle East. The Brotherhood's transformative international goals are similar to those of al-Qaeda. However, its leaders argue for the use of persuasion and education rather than violence, which it decided was unproductive and ineffective. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere has a strong pragmatic inclination and has shown itself to be enthusiastic about participating in democratic processes, both of which are anathema to al-Qaeda's doctrine. In the aftermath of the popular uprisings in 2011, something that al-Zawahiri could never have foreseen, the Brotherhood and even some previously apolitical Salafist groups played key roles in Egypt's democratic process; al-Qaeda remained on the sidelines as a critic but not an actor.

Despite the circumstances that afflicted the jihadist cadres and the leadership of al-Qaeda after the American invasion of Afghanistan, Ayman al-Zawahiri was not killed, captured, or wounded during his escape from Afghanistan. He also survived during America's subsequent focus on the invasion of Iraq.²⁶ So, in July 2010 he was able to publish the second edition of *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, in which he repeats

that he was not sure he would be able to complete the first edition; now, however, he notes that Allah has extended his life and that the bad circumstances that afflicted jihadists immediately after the American invasion of Afghanistan have improved to the point that he hopes to finish the second edition of his earlier work.

In his introduction to *Knights2*, al-Zawahiri repeats his rejection of the London publication of the English translation of *Knights1*. In the vastly expanded *Knights2*, a more hopeful al-Zawahiri does not intend to give the reader more of his strategic vision or updates on al-Qaeda's activities, as he explains at the beginning of his introduction:

In this edition I have expanded on a number of topics in the book, especially that which relates to the blessed raids against New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania. I decided to stop there and chose not to complete the exposition of the events that followed because the battle still rages and the enemy seizes upon any information. Likewise a number of the brothers are in enemy captivity and what I say could affect them. For this reason and others, I am content with detailing the blessed raids.²⁷

Most of the material in *Knights2* is more propaganda than strategy, including an extensive polemic against the United States. For example, it is very revealing that he would refer to a "blessed raid" against Pennsylvania, when it is clear that Flight 93 was not intended to destroy anything in Pennsylvania but was brought down because of the courageous resistance of its passengers. To help him with propaganda against the United States, al-Zawahiri has relied on the American jihadist Adam Gadahn.²⁸ This book covers everything from the American treatment of Native Americans to the contemporary divorce rate and the disparity in the length of life between white and black Americans. To understand the strategic outline al-Zawahiri intended jihadists to follow, the first edition of *Knights Under the*

Prophet's Banner is a good start, especially since it is available in great part to those who cannot read the Arabic. To avoid any distortions of his message, I am relying on al-Zawahiri's approved Arabic editions of *Knights1* or *Knights2*. The second edition is an important tool with which to chart the trajectory of al-Qaeda's polemic, but it is not relevant to the description of al-Qaeda's strategy after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Nor does it present a new strategic vision. Before analyzing *Knights1*, I would like to describe the writing methodology of jihadist authors of the al-Qaeda current, of which al-Zawahiri is good model.

The worst mistake that any al-Qaeda writer can make is to misquote a sacred text or an esteemed commentator on religious texts. On the one hand, al-Qaeda has adopted a revolutionary ideology, and its members do not mind views diverging from those of state-affiliated religious scholars. On the other hand, they cannot easily challenge a noted scholar who has amassed years of knowledge about the "sciences of religion." They are vulnerable if they make fundamental mistakes in religious arguments that religious scholars would easily correct. Next in concern to religious mistakes are the ordinary mistakes that any writer could make, which might be picked up by Western or Middle Eastern scholars and exploited. When al-Zawahiri has the time and resources, he footnotes his texts extensively with Western sources. For example, in *Knights2* al-Zawahiri uses extensive footnotes citing the *9/11 Commission Report*, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the works of Michael Scheuer, RAND reports, studies by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, articles from the Jamestown Foundation's *Terrorism Monitor*, and many other authoritative sources and authors.

In *Knights2*, al-Zawahiri generally cites Western sources to bolster points he wants to make about the United States; however, he also cites mistakes made in Western scholarship about details of al-Qaeda operations, documents, or general history. For example,

he cites a West Point study repeating the often quoted report that al-Zawahiri joined the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt when he was fourteen, which he claims is false.²⁹ In short, al-Zawahiri, like other al-Qaeda authors, is fastidious about what he writes and what is being written about him. These men take their books very seriously—much more seriously than the West takes them. They know their books will not be bestsellers or the most downloaded on a jihadist website—that honor is reserved for religious texts—but they do know that jihadist operators will use their texts to train others and guide them in violent operations and the formation of strategic plans. If their admirers want to publish their books on the Internet, these men insist on word-for-word fidelity. Readers can feel confident that what is written in both *Knights1* and *Knights2*, correct or incorrect, is exactly what the author wanted to say.

STRATEGIC POINTS IN *KNIGHTS1*

Knights1 presents its strategic advice to current and future jihadists in part 3, under the heading “The Future of the Jihadist Movement.” The author states that he intends to present that future in terms of the Egyptian jihadist movement in particular but also in terms of the world in general. Because it is important for al-Qaeda to persuade Muslim communities that the United States is at war with Islam, al-Zawahiri claims that “Western forces” have defined the enemy clearly as “Islamic fundamentalism.”³⁰ Here al-Zawahiri adds a curious point: he claims that the West has joined with its “former enemy Russia” in this war. As mentioned previously, after al-Zawahiri was thrown out of Sudan in 1995 he traveled to Dagestan, where he was picked up by Russian forces. He was held by the Russians for approximately six months and then released. Some observers find it difficult to understand how Russian intelligence would have failed to recognize such a prominent jihadist, one well known in security circles. The period of time of his detention and release raises the question that al-Zawahiri had been turned into an asset

by Soviet intelligence. Six months seems too long a time for a simple arrest and release but too short for a jail sentence; six months, on the other hand, might be just the right amount of time to interrogate, turn, and train an individual. This would be a conclusion al-Zawahiri would be eager to dispel, if such an idea occurred to his colleagues.³¹

Beyond this discordant note, al-Zawahiri's list of enemies, which he calls "tools," are familiar: the United Nations, Muslim rulers, multinational corporations, international communications and Internet providers, international news media, and international relief agencies.³² Against this "alliance," al-Zawahiri claims that a "fundamentalist alliance" is forming of various jihadist movements from Muslim countries. He also claims that there is a new phenomenon of young men giving up everything for the sake of joining in the jihad against the New World Order: "This age is witnessing a new and continuously growing phenomenon: the appearance of Jihadist youth, who forsake family, country, wealth, studies, and job to travel in search of the fields of jihad on the path of Allah."³³ Recognizing that this claim of a new "fundamentalist alliance" may ring hollow, al-Zawahiri asks the rhetorical question:

Perhaps, someone may ask: Don't you see that you are contradicting yourself? For, just a little while ago you were talking about despair spreading among some of the leaders of the Jihadist movement and now you are talking about a spreading Jihadist awakening!

The answer is simple: all movements witness a process of erosion and renewal but the general outcome is what determines the fate of the movement [whether] gradual disappearance or growth—and the Jihadist movement is growing and flourishing (by the grace of Allah).³⁴

This is a remarkable statement from a man who has admitted that he was not sure he would live to complete

the book in which this statement is made. His message is: I may die, but the Salafist jihadist enterprise will carry on, if you follow my basic prescription and avoid compromise; furthermore, you will not be alone, as many young men are ready to join you. This almost irrational determination to continue the fight defines the writings of those who continued to follow the al-Qaeda line, such as Abu Bakr Naji, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, Yusuf al-Uyayri, and the other participants in the jihad in Saudi Arabia that began in 2003. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, on the other hand, became separated from al-Qaeda's leadership after the American counterattack against Afghanistan. Al-Suri's mood after 9/11 might be described as defiant despair, yet his writings reflect all of al-Zawahiri's strategic points. As we shall describe below, even the one alteration that al-Suri made to his description of jihadist overarching grand strategy, giving up on establishing regional emirates, was intended to be temporary.³⁵

In the last pages of *Knights1*, one can detect strategic similarities between al-Zawahiri's message and those of other writers producing a flood of documents with strategic themes. For example, several key tenets in *Knights1* carry through the writings of all the strategists examined in the present book. The constant message is that jihad is the only "solution" and that jihadist *aqidah* (ideology) is revolutionary and requires uncompromising guerrilla warfare against the West. In addition, al-Zawahiri clearly states the strategic conclusion that jihad cannot be regionally based but must be global in nature because of the global nature of the Western threat. Jihadist leadership, moreover, must never compromise with local governments or participate in elections. None of these rules is tactical. They are strategic; they define al-Qaeda.

Equally strategic is the definition of the enemy: Israel and the United States, forever and without any compromise. Both Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri express hatred of Israel as one of their propaganda lines despite

that they have not directed much energy to attacking the Jewish state. Bin Laden generally focuses on the situation of the Palestinians to play off widespread Muslim sympathies. On occasion, Al-Zawahiri follows Bin Laden's example of Palestinians as victims for similar propaganda purposes, but in *Knights1*, when he is attempting to create a legacy, al-Zawahiri is focused primarily on the outcomes of Egypt's wars with Israel, especially the 1973 war.

Al-Zawahiri shared the rage of his colleague Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj at both the outcome of the 1973 war and the peace treaty that followed it. In fact, one can trace the origins of his hostility toward the United States to its support of Israel in the 1973 war.³⁶ Ironically, al-Zawahiri echoes his personal enemy Sadat's well-known claim that Egypt could not defeat Israel militarily in 1973 because of America's strong support and military resupply of Israel. He also devotes numerous pages to condemning the terms of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, which he views as a straightjacket fitted for Egypt by America.³⁷ Most of this polemic has become familiar over the years and is certainly not confined to al-Zawahiri. On the other hand, it was al-Zawahiri and his senior partner Bin Laden who made the United States the strategic centerpiece of their terrorist agenda, even though they were not the first group to attack the American homeland.³⁸ Their hatred for the United States is real, but they exploited it to give al-Qaeda the center place in jihadist circles and a degree of notoriety that they could not have achieved otherwise.

Knights1 is not a book about strategy; it is a mixture of history, polemics, and propaganda wrapped around al-Zawahiri's jihadist testament. Al-Zawahiri consigns most of his strategic points to the last few pages, entitled "Future of the Jihadist Movement." It is significant that points from the unauthorized English translation are repeated in the text of *Knights1* that al-Zawahiri reviewed and authorized for publication some eight years later. If al-Zawahiri had wanted to signal a change in al-Qaeda's

strategy, he could have used the authorized edition to send that message to his widely dispersed followers. There was no change in strategy after eight years. Al-Zawahiri did not need to instruct his audience on the basics of guerrilla warfare. He was aware that other al-Qaeda writers and trainers had been concerned with those details for years. Instead, he is sending signals about the top-level strategic vision—not the inspirational vision for which Bin Laden was the master but rather the political-military vision of the direction of jihad. For example, a large portion of his autobiographical book is about Egypt. If he had wanted to signal that Egypt should be the focus for guerrilla warfare, he would have made that point. Instead, he makes it clear that Egypt is difficult terrain for guerrilla warfare, using arguments familiar to readers of other al-Qaeda strategists such as Naji and al-Suri. As a practical example to prove his point, he tells about a jihadist who wanted to begin guerrilla warfare in Egypt but who al-Zawahiri sought to dissuade by offering him a classic book about guerrilla warfare to read. The young jihadist continued with his plans despite al-Zawahiri's advice, only to see his incipient guerrilla forces destroyed by the Egyptian government. My point in this analysis is to emphasize that one must be familiar with al-Qaeda's prominent strategic writers to appreciate fully how influential al-Zawahiri's subtle writings actually are, despite their cryptic nature. Before turning attention to those strategists, however, we should first examine al-Zawahiri's message in *Knights*¹. Readers of jihadist strategic literature will see al-Zawahiri's talking points repeated again and again.

POINTS ABOUT THE MOBILIZATION OF THE MUSLIM UMMAH FOR JIHAD

Although its membership has waxed and waned with the fortunes of war, al-Qaeda at its core has always been a relatively small organization. Its leaders and planners have always realized that they could be successful only if they were able to gather Muslim opinion to their cause.

Involving the entire Muslim community is the ultimate key to achieving their central goal. They have not chosen to take the gradual, persuasive, educational track of the Muslim Brotherhood. Naji sarcastically wrote that such an approach would be successful only after one thousand years. But at the same time, they support in theory some of the methods of the Brotherhood, such as charitable works and social support, which had long been a basic approach of pious, if not radical, groups in Egypt. The Egyptian leader also recognizes that dialogue with the “masses” is quite different from the ideological arguments of al-Qaeda’s elite. He begins this series of strategic points with the fundamental duty of the jihadist leadership: to provide a model for others to follow.

It is incumbent upon the Islamic movement in general and the Jihadist [movement] in particular to train themselves and their children in persistence, patience, steadfastness and adherence to principles and fixed points of reference [lit. fixed stars]; while [it is incumbent upon] the leadership to establish the model and set an example for their followers for this is the key to victory....

The Jihadist movement must free up one of its wings to work with the masses and to offer services to Muslim people, to share their concerns [using] all available manner of charitable and educational works. We must not leave any space available without filling it; we must gain the peoples’ trust, love, and respect. The people will not love us unless they feel our love for them, our concern, and our [willingness] to defend them.

In short, the Jihadist movement must engage in battle in the midst of the community and in front of it; and [the jihadist movement] must take every precaution to avoid separating itself from its community and [not] to rush into the battle against

the government as a battle of the elite against the authorities.

The Jihadist movement must strive for the participation of the Muslim ummah in its jihad to establish³⁹ [an Islamic emirate]; however, the Muslim ummah will not participate unless the slogans of the mujahedeen become understood by the masses of the Muslim ummah. Therefore, the Jihadist movement must give up restricting discussion of the battle to the slogans “sovereignty” [*hakimiyyah*] and “fidelity and withdrawal” [*wala’ wa bara’*] alone because unfortunately these slogans are not understood by the masses of the ummah.⁴⁰

The slogan which the masses of the Muslim ummah understand quite well and respond to—for the last fifty years—is the slogan of the call to jihad against Israel. In addition, during this decade, the ummah has become mobilized against the American presence in the heart of the Islamic world and appears quite responsive to the call for jihad against America.

Indeed, one glance at the history of mujahedeen in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Chechnya shows that the Jihadist movement became the heart of the leadership of the ummah when it adopted the slogans of liberating the ummah from its external enemies while demonstrating that it was a battle of Islam against infidelity and infidels.

The reality that must be accepted is that the question of Palestine is the issue that inflames the feelings of the Muslim ummah—for the last fifty years—from Morocco to Indonesia; moreover, this is the issue that unites the Arabs in their entirety, believers and infidels, pious and profligate. And it is also 100% a religious issue whether from our perspective or that of the Jews, no matter how our

media organizations or those of the West try to divert us from that.

By extension in this context, we must stress to the Muslim ummah the widespread importance of liberating the land of the two holy places [Saudi Arabia] and the sensitivity of this issue in the hearts of Muslims high and low. Truly, the issue is a sharp weapon in the hand of the Islamic Jihadist movement and it would be a great negligence if it failed to carry the burden and a great failure if it hesitated to lead the ummah in jihad for this reason and to prepare—for that is the foremost of powers—if not the only one.

Therefore the Islamic Jihadist movement must raise the slogan of liberating the three holy places of Islam; the noble Ka'ba, the noble Mosque of the Prophet, and Jerusalem (al-Masjid al-Aqsa'); by this means it will convene a crisis in the leadership of the Islamic ummah and rally around itself the hearts of Muslims from all over the earth.

If the Jihadist Islamic movement does not mobilize the ummah in its struggle to establish an Islamic state, then it will isolate itself and transform its struggle into a struggle between the elite and the authorities. In this struggle, it would be easy for the rulers to crush the Islamic movement quietly....

The Islamic Jihadist movement in addition to adhering to its call to absolute monotheism and pure ideology and principles of belief like the sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*) of Allah alone and fidelity and withdrawal (*wala' wa bara'*) for it [the jihadist movement] may very easily explain these issues to the masses through active jihad under the slogans of jihad against the Jews and Americans and defense of the three holy places.

The Jihadist movement must present a practical example of making Egypt a flame under

the feet of the Jews and the Americans. Pursuing Americans and Jews is not an absurd act because killing them with a bullet, or a knife thrust, or an explosive, or homemade mixture, or hitting them with an iron bar is not an absurd thing. Moreover, burning their property with Molotov cocktails is not difficult. Indeed small groups with available means can take a frightening, dreadful form for Americans and Jews in the land of Egypt.⁴¹

These points are reflected not only in the writings of the strategists after 9/11 but also in al-Qaeda and its affiliates' operations. Like their leaders, the strategists Naji and al-Suri both recognize the difference between what appeals to the vast majority of Muslims and the obsessions of the devoted Salafist jihadists who follow al-Qaeda's ideology. Those who read or listen to the public announcements of al-Zawahiri or Osama Bin Laden are familiar with the many references to Palestine and their uncompromising opposition to negotiations with Israel. There is nothing new in that aspect of al-Zawahiri's points. What is clear, however, is that talking about the "Jews and the Americans" is intended to rally the Muslim community to admire, if not support, al-Qaeda.

What is less clear is whether Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri care at all about the Palestinians and what they want, despite their many statements of support; instead, both men appear interested only in "liberating" Palestine on and for their own ideological and religious grounds. One thing is certain: al-Qaeda does not care that Palestinians want to have a voice in the way they are governed, frame their own laws, and set up their own system of government. The essence of *hakimiyyah* (according to the way al-Qaeda interprets Islamic law) is that governing belongs to Allah alone. What Christian Palestinians or Muslims with a different perspective want is irrelevant. Al-Qaeda regularly opposes even the

austere jihadist organization Hamas, which has a charter calling for an Islamic state of Palestine.

By telling his followers to avoid al-Qaeda's Qutbist slogans, al-Zawahiri is not rejecting those slogans and concepts. He is simply acknowledging that public relations are different from theory. He is playing the political game. In essence, he is saying that to unite the Muslim community, al-Qaeda must address Muslim concerns like the status of Jerusalem, the invasion of Muslim countries by foreign powers, or the plight of Palestinians. Talking about the finer points of Salafist jihadist ideology does not appeal to ordinary Muslims and may even repel them or at least seem odd. Al-Zawahiri is keenly aware that the Saudis and others often refer to al-Qaeda as Qutbists, a term that is meant to indicate that al-Qaeda follows the teachings of a man rather than Allah, something that would be considered anathema to anyone calling himself a Salafist. When he writes *Knights*², al-Zawahiri complains that even American experts are using the term Qutbist to describe jihadists instead of referring to them simply as Muslims.⁴²

In the last point quoted above, al-Zawahiri leaves appeals to public opinion and turns to an important post-9/11 issue: striking behind enemy lines. The example involves attacking "Jews and Americans" inside Egypt, but the point he is making has wider implications. The use of small groups operating independently was clearly an important part of al-Zawahiri's thinking before other authors adopted similar arguments.⁴³ Al-Zawahiri introduces the small-group concept in his personal priority area, Egypt, because the combination of the powerful security forces and the unique terrain make direct action along the Nile impossible in the near term. The same point could be made for other locations in which open jihad (guerrilla warfare) is not possible, such as the United States, Europe, or Israel. This topic is developed in great detail by authors of al-Qaeda's strategic literature following al-Zawahiri's lead.

Al-Zawahiri is trying to be a radical pragmatist, always a difficult act. He is fully aware that al-Qaeda's ideology seems strange to most Muslims. Al-Qaeda, moreover, is not an organization devoted to preaching; their leaders are devoted to war and terrorism to gain their ends. Al-Qaeda needs to rally Muslim communities around issues that speak to them, rather than using terms they would find strange—terms almost as strange as they are to Americans. Realizing that he cannot appear to abandon al-Qaeda's ideology by giving advice to avoid jihadist slogans in public relations exercises, al-Zawahiri tries to argue that violent jihad can provide occasions to teach the communities lessons about *hakimiyyah* and similar concepts.

The version of *Knights 1* approved by al-Zawahiri has references to Saudi Arabia that do not appear in the English translation. We know that the decision was made to launch jihad against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia not long after al-Zawahiri asserted that the concept of liberating the two holy places in Saudi Arabia is one of the key issues that unites the Muslim ummah.⁴⁴ Despite the number of times al-Qaeda figures state this, it does not seem to be true. In fact, few Muslims, including those who do not admire the kingdom, seem to think Saudi Arabia needs to be “liberated” by al-Qaeda. With jihad against Israel not really feasible or not a near-term priority, al-Qaeda tried to capitalize on both the presence of American troops and the existence of homegrown radical Muslim dissidents within Saudi Arabia to launch jihad there in 2003.⁴⁵

The United States withdrew its troops from the kingdom just weeks before the jihad was launched, thereby dramatically weakening al-Qaeda's claim that it sought to fight Americans and other non-Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Then, the American invasion of Iraq gave many Muslims the opportunity to focus on classic jihad against the American forces in Iraq. Classic jihad calls for the defense of Muslim lands from soldiers; it does not justify attacking resident aliens or noncombatants. The

presence of American troops on Iraqi soil caused some Muslims (but by no means all or even a majority) to conclude that they had a duty to defend Iraq from the Americans. The early jihadist attacks inside Iraq had nothing to do with al-Qaeda. The leader of that jihad, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, was persuaded by Osama Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda after months of negotiation. Even after al-Zarqawi joined al-Qaeda, the central leadership had little beyond persuasion to affect anything al-Zarqawi decided to do in his personal campaign. Al-Qaeda is opportunist, and had the jihad in Iraq proved successful, al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden were ready to claim it as a great victory. The real target for jihad in the plans of the leadership of al-Qaeda, however, remained the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula in general.

Next, al-Zawahiri makes a number of further observations about how to gain the allegiance of the Muslim ummah. Some of these have become familiar through the public statements and writings of key figures within al-Qaeda. Al-Zawahiri emphasizes that part of the coming battle is to make the Muslim public aware of several key propaganda points in the al-Qaeda narrative:

1. Expose rulers as clients of foreign forces fighting Islam
2. Explain that jihad against the client rulers and their masters in Washington, Moscow, and Tel Aviv is an individual legal obligation of every Muslim
3. Highlight the importance of fidelity to believers and rejection of infidels in the Muslim belief structure
4. Impose on every Muslim the responsibility of defending Islam, its holy places, its ummah, and its homes
5. Warn against Islamic scholars of evil governments and remind of the truth of the

jihadist scholars and the duty to support the latter

6. Expose the enormity of the occupation that crushes the ummah and the extent of the aggression against “our belief structure” and “our holy places” and the “looting to which our wealth is exposed”⁴⁶

References to the ummah, the global Muslim community, by al-Zawahiri or Bin Laden are more than the expression of their aspirational vision of a community or caliphate to be achieved as the result of jihad. A more informative touchstone is the China of Mao Tse-tung, which, like the ummah of al-Qaeda, was weak, diverse, divided, and under attack by outside forces significantly stronger than native ones. Like Mao's China, the ummah has the advantages of vast territory and a large population sharing a rudimentary view of its identity. Like Mao, al-Qaeda leaders knew they could not win in a short war and believed that time was on their side.

AGAINST ABANDONING THE GOAL OF AN ISLAMIC STATE IN MUSLIM LANDS

The points associated with this strategic goal emphasize a major motivation behind al-Zawahiri's book: a renewal of the struggle to establish an Islamic emirate in the heart of the Middle East from which al-Qaeda could operate and that could ultimately serve as the base for reestablishing the caliphate. After the loss of their safe haven in Afghanistan, many jihadists were naturally discouraged. Many no longer believed that the United States could be defeated as the Soviet Union had been in Afghanistan. Al-Zawahiri must have been concerned that new recruits might be harder to attract if the Muslim consensus was that attacking the United States had been foolhardy. Such despair would have destroyed al-Qaeda's reason for existing. So, despite the inherent dangers in trying to control a portion of land, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were convinced that they had to act to maintain the momentum al-Qaeda had gained by the

9/11 attacks. In the following points, al-Zawahiri does not try to make the task look easy; it is simply unavoidable.

The Jihadist movement must build its plan on the basis of controlling a portion of land in the heart of the Islamic world in which to establish a defensible Islamic state from which it will launch its battle to restore the Rightly Guided Caliphate according to the program of prophethood (*manhaj al-nubuwah*). Just as armies cannot achieve victory except through the occupation of a portion of land, likewise the Jihadist Islamic movement will not achieve victory against the global infidel alliance without possessing a base in the heart of the Islamic world. Without the establishment of a caliphate in the heart of the Islamic world, everything we have reviewed, the means and the plans of assembling and mobilizing the ummah, will be left hanging in the air without a concrete result or demonstrable benefit....

Successful operations against the enemies of Islam and the severe damage done to them, unless they [operations] advance the goal of establishing a Muslim state in the heart of the Islamic world—no matter how glorious [these operations] are—will be no more than disturbing acts that can be contained and whose effects can be absorbed, even if after some time and with some losses.

Truly the establishment of a Muslim state in the heart of the Islamic world is not an easy goal nor is it something to be won in the near term; but it is the hope of the Muslim ummah to regain its fallen caliphate and lost glory.⁴⁷

In this group of strategic points, al-Zawahiri reminds his readers that al-Qaeda's goal is not simply to establish a state built on Salafist jihadist terms. This might be a midterm goal, but it is not the end in itself. Osama Bin Laden did not declare war on the United

States simply because he thought American culture was evil, nor because he thought the Taliban emirate in Afghanistan was a goal worthy of his ambitions. Afghanistan was the safe haven, the spot of land upon which al-Qaeda could find refuge in order to move out into “the heart of the Muslim world,” which for Bin Laden and many Muslims is the Arabian Peninsula. Osama Bin Laden promised Mullah Omar that he would stop targeting America and stop inflaming the airwaves with his burning rhetoric against America.⁴⁸ He had no intention of keeping his promise, because to do so would be to abandon his pursuit of global jihad to return Islam to its former glories and to fulfill Allah’s command. For Bin Laden, Afghanistan might be considered what al-Zawahiri refers to as an “Islamic State in the heart of the Islamic world,” but it was not nor could it ever be a candidate for the seat of the caliphate. It had neither the history nor prominence in the eyes of the global Muslim population—and certainly not in the eyes of the Arabs of al-Qaeda.

After the Turkish caliphate fell in 1924, some Egyptian intellectuals debated the need for its reestablishment. Egyptians, who refer to the land of the Nile as Umm al-Dunya (the Mother of the World), tend to think of their country as the center of all points of reference, including that of Islam, so the idea of a revived caliphate in Egypt appealed to some Egyptians.⁴⁹ No doubt al-Zawahiri shared this view, but he well understood from bitter experience by the time he wrote *Knights*¹ that Egypt was not vulnerable to guerrilla warfare or a jihadist revolution in the near term. As a young man, he had been seized with the idea of a second army coup in Egypt, this time of Islamists within the military who would listen to the jihadist call, but he gave this idea up.⁵⁰ By the time he was writing *Knights*¹ he recognized that the populace would have to be transformed over time and given a stake in global jihad. An army coup (very difficult for Egyptian jihadists in any case) could not achieve this transformation of the populace. This is why Naji, following al-Zawahiri’s and

Bin Laden's line, did not place Egypt in the first tier of candidates for jihad. Al-Qaeda's first tier of candidates for jihad in 2004 included the Arabian Peninsula, which was likely al-Qaeda's target all along.

POINTS THAT SIGNAL A NEW PATH

Peter Bergen recounts the story of a Yemeni doctor, Ayman Saeed Abdullah Batarfi, who resented Bin Laden's desertion during the battle of Tora Bora to escape capture by Americans or their tribal allies.⁵¹ It is reasonable that al-Qaeda's leadership would be concerned that such feelings could undermine Bin Laden's carefully crafted image as the brave jihadist warrior commander. Al-Zawahiri provides a different scenario about what occurred at Tora Bora, but few could miss his intention of excusing not only Bin Laden's but also his own conduct in the face of imminent American victory in those fateful days in December 2001.

But here a question arises of the utmost importance and criticality: what if the movement were to be exposed to the discovery of its members and plans or the arrest of individuals, whereupon the movement's existence became threatened by a campaign of arrests and raids to consume its money, resources, and leaders? Here, the movement must ask itself a sharply delineated question and give a clear answer. Could it hide in the face of the storm and withdraw from the field with a minimum of losses? Or, is patience inglorious and nothing but a complete disaster with no room for withdrawal [from the battle]? Perhaps, the answer is a mixture of two previously mentioned possibilities, i.e., [the movement] can withdraw some of its leaders and individuals to safety but expose part to the risk of capture and violent attack.

The answer in my opinion is that the movement can withdraw them [the leaders] to a

place of safety without hesitation, reluctance, or relying on illusions. The most dangerous thing to confront in a siege is the decision to escape. It is among the harshest of things—to leave family, job, rank, and established way of life for the unknown, anxiety, and life of constant change.

However, no sooner does the cell door lock the prisoner in than he wishes to live his life as a fugitive without shelter instead of the humiliation of captivity and submissiveness. The strongest aspect of captivity is the humiliation under pressure [when] the noble Jihadist is compelled by torture to identify his brothers and forced to destroy the movement with his own hand, and see it fly like ashes in a windstorm under the powerful pain of torture and give his secrets and the secrets of his dear, noble brothers to his enemies, the despicable hired agents.

To the extent that the entire movement or part of it confronts a situation in which the siege may be strengthened around it so that the [movement's] fall becomes a matter of hours or days, then at that point the movement or this wing must initiate the battle of the [final] clash against the tyrannical regime so that no [mujahid] is captured or killed without [the enemy paying] a price.⁵²

In the passages quoted above, al-Zawahiri refers both to what had already happened and to the wider implications of those events. The actual events, to which he never refers, are what occurred after the American counterattack in Afghanistan when Osama Bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and some others fled Tora Bora while U.S. spotters coordinated ferocious American air attacks and their local allies engaged al-Qaeda's fighters on the ground. The American forces, however, did not complete the encirclement of Tora Bora, whether for lack of troops in theater or, as some have suggested, because the United States leadership had turned its attention to

preparations for the invasion of Iraq. Whatever the reason, the failure to encircle Tora Bora allowed al-Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden to escape by a planned route, causing some al-Qaeda members to resent Bin Laden's retreat from the battle in order to save himself. So, without ever alluding to this event, al-Zawahiri is giving the rationale behind his own and Bin Laden's flight from imminent danger at Tora Bora and their subsequent life in hiding.

Al-Zawahiri also points out that a life on the run has its own inherent dangers and anxieties but that it is far preferable to incarceration with the kind of torture that he experienced in prison in Egypt. His passionate description of the effects of torture also supports the notion that jihadists must never surrender. In some circumstances, al-Qaeda leaders must decide whether to escape to safe haven or fight to the death. In 2002, al-Qaeda had decided that its leadership needed to sequester itself or be lost in the storm of America's counterattack. At the same time, it is not clear that the leadership had given up entirely on its pyramidal organizational hierarchy in favor of a decentralized system of terrorism and insurgency. The leadership was to give some direction to the jihad in Saudi Arabia, and Bin Laden remained remotely connected to operations until his final days. Al-Zawahiri, driven by necessity, was about to join the isolated central leadership circle with a few others, including Osama Bin Laden, to become guides and inspiration to widely dispersed guerrillas and individual clandestine cells functioning within a loosely structured terrorist network. As we shall see in detail, it is remarkable how al-Qaeda's strategic writers picked up on al-Zawahiri's words, which had been written so soon after al-Qaeda's structure was disrupted and almost destroyed.

STRIKING THE ENEMY IN OUR COUNTRIES

After establishing that al-Qaeda needs to separate its leadership from the group that will directly engage in operations, al-Zawahiri begins to establish priority

targets. Since 2001, al-Qaeda doctrine has become better known, but when al-Zawahiri first penned the following points, it was relatively new outside of al-Qaeda's top leadership and their advisors. In the aftermath of Tora Bora, Bin Laden became much less active, so much so that there was periodic speculation in the West as to whether he was dead or gravely ill. After a period of keeping a low profile, al-Zawahiri became much more active than Bin Laden as the public face of al-Qaeda for most purposes. This was a conscious strategy because any activity, even a video or audio message delivered through multiple cutouts, could expose the leadership to death or captivity.

These two men developed different styles and served different purposes. Bin Laden was oracular, with high-flown rhetoric and a clear attempt to appeal to the masses of Muslims, even when he addressed his statements to non-Muslims. Al-Zawahiri is more analytical, more operational, and occasionally serves the role of geopolitical analyst. In *Knights*¹, al-Zawahiri plays all these roles and encourages his followers to stay engaged, show patience, and recognize that the path will be long and fraught with peril. These are themes that al-Qaeda strategists expounded in great detail. The points quoted below illustrate some of these themes.

Here we must repeat what we have explained concerning the nature and composition of the global anti-Islamic system and its relationship to the ruling regimes in our countries. We have stressed the necessity of mobilizing the ummah in the battle of Islam against infidelity. And we have warned of the danger of the Muslim vanguard being killed quietly in the battle of the elite or the power[ful] against the authorities.

So, if evil powers drag us into battle at a time not of our choosing, we must respond in a field of our choice, i.e., attack the Americans and Jews in our countries. Here we win three times:

1. When we direct the blow against the big master who hides from our attacks behind his agent

2. When we include the community in our ranks by choosing a target where people sympathize with those who hit it

3. We win the third time by exposing the regime to the Muslim people when it attacks us in defense of its masters, the Americans and the Jews, showing thereby the ugly face, the face of the policeman, the faithful hireling in service of the occupiers, the enemies of the Muslim ummah

If our goal were the complete change of the situation in Egypt and if our path—as the Qur'an makes clear to us and as our history has taught us—our path of jihad and sacrifice is long; we must not give up all hope because of repeated blows and the multiplication of disasters; and we must not lay down our arms whatever losses and sacrifices we face....⁵³

We know that every attempt to establish the rule of Allah in Egypt, even those that failed, produced damage and losses to the enemies of Allah....⁵⁴

We know that states do not fall suddenly; they fall defending and fighting. After every blow, we must build anew, even if we are compelled to begin from zero. But in reality we never begin from zero; victory is gained through an accumulation of the efforts of generations. What may appear to be a disaster in one phase can be a spark to light the torch of guidance in a following phase.⁵⁵

Abu Bakr Naji wrote that al-Qaeda's top leadership, including al-Zawahiri, had set priorities for jihad in regional countries before he wrote *Knights*¹ (see [chapter 4](#)). The top-priority countries included those meeting

conditions that would make jihad or insurgency possible, i.e., those where al-Qaeda should invest resources on internal terror campaigns. The ideal conditions for such a campaign, which al-Qaeda generally calls jihad, include geographic features favorable to an insurgency, the lack of a strong nationalist sense in the population, the presence of jihadist factions inside the country, and a population that is adept at war and has access to weapons. Top-tier priorities included Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, Algeria, and Nigeria. The second tier, including Egypt, are those countries in which jihad needs help from outside powers. Like Naji, al-Zawahiri was clear that internal jihadist groups should engage in activities that would damage the rulers, but they could not expect to win or receive help in the short run. It appears that al-Zawahiri, the former head of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, needed to tell Egyptian jihadists that they had not been forgotten and must continue the struggle through dark days. He makes the point that nations resist violently when threatened, so they should expect to suffer.

MOVING THE BATTLE TO THE LAND OF THE ENEMY

So far in his summary of the future of the jihadist movement in *Knights*¹, al-Zawahiri has addressed what in al-Suri's later description were two of the three strategic circles of jihad adopted by al-Qaeda. First is the leadership circle, in which top leaders are sequestered in a nonoperational role with very few direct contacts with operational circles. The second circle was what al-Suri referred to as "open fronts," places like Afghanistan, Chechnya, and the Arabian Peninsula. Al-Zawahiri now turns to the third circle, which al-Suri described as independent or small-group jihad. Third-circle activity can be carried out in some Muslim countries like Egypt but is primarily intended for the United States and Europe, although al-Zawahiri includes Muslim areas within the former Soviet Union and Russia itself. Al-Zawahiri had traveled to Iran to find out how they made their revolution work. Iran identified its "great Satan" as

the United States and used it as the external force needed to unify Iran; al-Zawahiri adopted the term “great master” for approximately the same purposes. The challenge for al-Qaeda is much greater, however, because it needs to unify an entire religion spread across the globe instead of just one country.

The Islamist movement and the Jihadist vanguard or rather the entire Islamic ummah must force the greatest criminals into battle, America, Russia, and Israel, and not leave them to direct the battle between the Jihadist movement and client regimes. After they have imagined they were safe, instead they must pay and pay dearly—the price for propping up the regimes of oppression, tyranny, and corruption.

The masters in Washington use these regimes to protect their interests and to enter the dirty battle against Muslims in their place. But if the shrapnel of battle were to reach into their houses and bodies, would they not exchange charges with their clients concerning who was negligent in his role? Would they not then be presented two choices—both bitter—either they can enter battle directly with Muslims and thereby transform the battle into clear jihad against the infidels or they can begin to review their plan anew after conceding the failure of their harsh and brutal confrontation against Muslims.⁵⁶

Therefore, we must move the battle to the land of the enemy in order to burn the hands of those who light fires in our lands.⁵⁷

Al-Zawahiri attempts to present the United States with a classic dilemma, a “fork,” in chess terms, in which either choice leads to a bad outcome. This is a trick that will be repeated during the “long war.” Al-Zawahiri theorizes that America can be forced to fight Muslims directly and lose because all Muslims will join the fight, or America can withdraw from Muslim lands and lose.

Tala'i' al-Khurasan (The Vanguard of Khorasan), al-Qaeda's Arabic-language journal of the jihad in Afghanistan, emphasizes a similar strategic fork in relation to that war as it has developed after the resurgence of the Taliban. Its June 2009 cover states: "The American Dilemma in Afghanistan: Humiliating Withdrawal or Disastrous Occupation?"⁵⁸

These kinds of dilemmas have not always worked out the way al-Qaeda had hoped. For example, in 2003 the United States withdrew its forces from Saudi Arabia without any "humiliation." Furthermore, the United States has, without serious repercussions, withdrawn its forces from Iraq and announced plans to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan according to a general timeline. Moreover, the American invasion of Iraq attracted many foreign Muslim fighters to the war, and America suffered a severe drop in approval within Muslim countries, but neither the entire Muslim population nor a significant part of it joined in "jihad" against the United States. Al-Zawahiri summarizes the need "to move the battle to the land of the enemy to burn the hands that set fire to our lands" as follows:

- It is not possible to enter the struggle to establish a Muslim State as a regional struggle
- It is not possible to defer the struggle with the external enemy
- Unite before one enemy!
- Rally around Jihadist countries and support them⁵⁹

These themes are fully developed in the writings of al-Qaeda ideologues and strategists. One of the key themes of al-Qaeda's writings after 9/11 is for all jihadists to unite and abandon regional jihadist struggles that were not connected to the struggle against the United States and its allies. The al-Qaeda terrorist campaign in Iraq after the American invasion demonstrates the meaning of al-Zawahiri's rallying call of Muslim unity in

the face of a unified enemy. It is now well documented that Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi began the brutal jihad in Iraq as the leader of his own jihadist group al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad). It took months of negotiation before al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda and Bin Laden. The concept of unity put forward by al-Zawahiri meant unity under Bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

CHANGING THE METHOD OF HARASSMENT AND ATTACK

Al-Zawahiri recognizes that al-Qaeda and jihadists in general must change their tactics and adjust their strategy to meet the challenge posed by the United States and its allies after the attacks of 9/11.⁶⁰ He clearly believes that America will be increasing its attacks and that jihadists need to rise to meet the challenge.

The Islamic Jihadist movement must improve its methods of attack and its means of resisting its enemies to confront the astonishing increase in the size of its enemies and the quality and destructive power of their weapons, their contempt for all forbidden practices and disrespect even for accepted rules of warfare and conflict. Here we concentrate on the following:

Striving to cause the largest losses on the opponent and inflict the greatest number of casualties—no matter how much the preparation for these kinds of operations costs in terms of effort and time—because this is the language the West understands.

Concentrating on suicide operations because they are the most successful method of inflicting damage [*nikayah*] on the opponent with the fewest losses to the mujahedeen.

Choosing the targets and type of weapons and means [of delivery] to have an effect on the joints of the structure of the enemy and deter it

sufficiently to prevent its oppression and arrogance and contempt for forbidden practices and accepted rules and return the struggle to its real size.

To confirm what has already been explained, we emphasize that concentration on the internal enemy alone will not be useful in this phase.⁶¹

Al-Zawahiri's strategic points above represent the methodologies al-Qaeda has adopted and followed. Since its expulsion from Afghanistan, al-Qaeda has in fact followed these points according to the three circles of jihad, which are described in detail by al-Suri (see [chapter 5](#)) and are implicit in the writings of Abu Bakr Naji (see [chapter 4](#)). The first circle, the leadership circle (Bin Laden before his death, al-Zawahiri, and a very few others), remains remote, dispersed, and hidden. We speculated about its location, assuming it was somewhere in the remote tribal regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The discovery of Bin Laden living in Abbottabad, Pakistan, indicates that public speculation was wide of the mark. Furthermore, it is highly likely that members of the leadership circle are rarely, if ever, together.

The second circle of regional affiliates in "open fronts" is alive at least in Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, and the Sahel, and there are increasing indications that it is growing in Somalia and perhaps Nigeria. The open fronts in Afghanistan and within the Russian Federation are following the al-Qaeda playbook, although the connection of these to current al-Qaeda leadership is subject to debate. The third circle of independent small-group and individual operations continues to operate in Europe and in the United States. These so-called independent cells are not completely cut off from other elements of al-Qaeda. It is difficult, for example, to credit the bombings in London and Madrid to homegrown terrorists alone. It is much more likely that these operations had training and support from al-Qaeda, either from one of its affiliates or perhaps from a

prominent member of the inner circle of advisors like Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. No one has been able to prove that al-Suri was involved in either of these actions, but it is highly likely that a training cadre similar to what al-Suri calls "builder units" trained the individuals who carried out the attacks in both cities. Such training can be conducted in an open-front conflict or within the target country by an itinerant trainer. In the United States, individuals who attempted to carry out terrorist attacks either were not trained or were forced to seek training abroad from an al-Qaeda affiliate or ally. Traveling to or from Yemen at this point will tend to flag an American citizen without a good reason for such travel. Pakistan is more problematic, but reportedly al-Qaeda or its surrogates in Pakistan trained several individuals accused of plotting terrorist attacks in the United States.

The most fundamental requirement for an individual or sleeper cell in the United States is a clean record. The dilemma for would-be terrorists, therefore, is to attempt to perform such acts without training or to seek training and lose their clean status. The example of the Mumbai attacks carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba presents a more difficult threat. Anyone with military training or experience could carry out devastating small-arms attacks on population centers. Such attacks in the United States, with its robust police capability, while clearly possible, would require individuals to decide to become suicide attackers by committing what is sometimes referred to as suicide by police, that is, committing acts with the certain knowledge that the police will be forced to kill or at least seriously wound them.

Al-Zawahiri is a prolific writer and speaker. He has addressed numerous topics over the years, including torture in Egyptian prisons, the perfidy of the Muslim Brotherhood, and technical arguments as to why Pakistan is not an Islamic state. Perhaps the volume of his words (especially if one considers his many Internet videos) to a certain extent prevents the West from focusing on any particular set of words or paragraphs

within lengthy books or monographs. Yet just the few pages on the topic in *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* contain a microcosm of the jihadist strategy al-Qaeda followed over the next decade and continues to follow today.

Three

Jihad as Revolution

Uprising must rely upon the high tide of the revolutionary movement of the masses ... not upon a conspiracy.

—Lenin, as quoted by General Vo Nguyen Giap

Inspired by Ayman al-Zawahiri's call for a new strategy, al-Qaeda's political-military writers generated new books and articles starting in 2002 that reflected al-Qaeda's best thinking about how to defeat the United States and its regional allies. These writers took full advantage of the Internet to promulgate their thoughts in forums, magazines, and books delivered online or via portable media. America had just surprised al-Qaeda in Afghanistan with its rapid response to 9/11, destroying the Taliban emirate by December 2001. How could a weak jihadist force defeat the world's greatest superpower? Al-Qaeda had given this question a great deal of thought over the years, but now they were forced to focus on it anew.

The challenge for al-Qaeda was to find a strategy that could neutralize these advantages. The strategist Abu Bakr Naji referred his readers to several sources to understand in greater detail Salafist jihadist, that is, al-Qaeda's, political-military strategy and tactics. For military strategy, he refers to the work of Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi, who wrote for the online journal *Al-Ansar*. For more detail on both strategy and tactics, Naji refers his readers to the military magazine *Mu'askar al-Battar* (*Saber Training Camp*), the military journal to which al-Muqrin often contributed. This journal was the military counterpart to the political journal *Sawt al-Jihad* (*The Voice of Jihad*) for which Naji wrote. Each of these men

had a different role to play. Al-Qurashi was the consummate journalist, or perhaps propagandist, for al-Qaeda. Al-Muqrin was a soldier and commander of jihad in the Arabian Peninsula. Along with Naji, al-Suri, and al-Zawahiri, these two men are arguably the most lucid and representative writers on al-Qaeda's political-military strategy and doctrine after 9/11.¹

Strategy, tactics, and doctrine are used throughout jihadist writings in sometimes confusing ways. Strategy is the overarching concept that coordinates the means to achieve goals and objectives. Tactics are the "how to" methods at a lower level than strategy, for example, small-unit tactics concerning how to kidnap a high-ranking person in a motorcade in a densely populated city. Doctrine refers to the set of beliefs and principles governing the deployment of military force. Operations must always be planned in detail and broken down into distinct phases to achieve a specified political goal. In simple terms: strategy is general, tactics are particular, and doctrine is a set of rules and definitions.

ABU UBAYD AL-QURASHI: THE JOURNALIST OF STRATEGY

Like most of al-Qaeda's strategists, the details of al-Qurashi's biography beyond his role as an author of strategic jihadist literature are not known. His name is a pseudonym. Some analysts believe he was an advisor to Osama Bin Laden, which is likely.² His role after 9/11 seems to have been as a jihadist journalist or propagandist whose aim was to prove to other jihadists and potential recruits that al-Qaeda could defeat the United States. To overcome conventional wisdom and simple common sense that a military victory over the United States was a highly improbable outcome, al-Qurashi attempted to describe a new kind of guerrilla war with ancient roots in Islamic jihad and Chinese strategy as well as modern models in communist insurgencies and what American military strategists sometimes call "fourth-generation warfare." In addition, he emphasized real or imagined shortcomings of

American power and prowess taken from current or historical events and occasionally from American self-criticism, debates about the shortcomings in American military strategy that have always been a part of American defense intellectuals' discussions in and out of uniform.

Like so many other strategists, al-Qurashi seems to have disappeared from the face of the earth without a trace. The short essays to which Naji directs his readers in his own book *Idarah al-Tawahhush* (*The Administration of Savagery*) were published primarily in the online jihadist magazine *Al-Ansar* (2002–2003), although older writings appeared on a pre-9/11 website, *Al-Uswa al-Hasana* (The Excellent Model).³ The footnotes to his articles reflect a vast array of sources: Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Mao Tse-tung, General Giap, Che Guevara, various American and French authors, and the Brazilian Marxist author and terrorist Carlos Marighella. Like other al-Qaeda strategists, al-Qurashi was a great admirer of Robert Taber's *The War of the Flea*.⁴ Taber's advice to his readers is to consider all guerrilla war to be revolutionary war—good advice for anyone studying al-Qaeda's activities and strategy.

“REVOLUTIONARY WARS”

For al-Qaeda, Islam is revolution not just in the sense of an insurgency but in an ideological and political sense as well. Therefore, it is fitting that one of al-Qurashi's early articles is entitled “Revolutionary Wars.” Its opening lines tell the reader his purpose in not only this article, which likely appeared before 9/11, but also in the series of articles he wrote for the journal *Al-Ansar* in 2002:

This century has witnessed devastating war between the Islamic movement and its enemies over [the movement's] serious attempt to tip the scales of power to benefit the truth and its people. In response, the enemies of Islam have tried to monopolize all sources of power along with its theoretical and practical foundations. [This is] a

desperate attempt to prevent the young men of Islam from developing a new military spirit and from absorbing historical lessons to invent new military strategies and methods to take the enemies by surprise. For this reason, I have chosen this article as the beginning of a series of articles aimed at promoting the spread of a military culture in the ranks of the Islamic movement.

I began with “Revolutionary Wars” for several reasons:

- Because they are a model for war of the weak against the strong, offering a good chance of victory for the weak
- Because they enjoy a reasonable degree of coverage in theoretical literature
- Because the Jihadist movement often has adopted some of their methods without a full grasp of all the dimensions and foundations for these kinds of wars⁵

Al-Qurashi distinguishes between the terms “Islamic movement” and “jihadist movement.” While he is familiar with the violent jihadist movement as one of its prominent sons, he is not addressing its members. This article is a recruiting and educational piece aimed mainly at young Muslim men who have not yet committed to al-Qaeda-type jihad. Al-Qurashi is more than a mere propagandist. He is an operative in al-Zawahiri’s strategy to destroy respect for and fear of the United States among Muslims and convince them that the weaker forces of al-Qaeda could defeat even the great superpower by using time-tested principles and methods of classic guerrilla warfare as expounded by Mao and others who followed his path. And why do young Muslims not know more about the possibilities of revolutionary warfare and more about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the United States? Al-Qurashi’s answer is proposed in the passage quoted

above: America does not want you to know; they try to monopolize knowledge just as they do power. Al-Qurashi's mission is to fill the knowledge vacuum and create a military culture or at least one that discusses military theory and practice. How does al-Qurashi obtain this knowledge? Part of the answer is that he mines the literature of the U.S. defense establishment for ideas, especially the ideas of critics of America's strategy past and present.

Al-Qurashi was well aware that he must first educate his audience in strategic concepts, so he begins with a conventional definition of revolutionary war, which entails a "comprehensive and fundamental change in political organization, social structure, economic property, and the existing social conditions." Whereas conventional armies pursue control of land, sea, or air, revolutionary armies define victory through achieving political, social, economic, and cultural objectives. Although *Revolutionary Wars* likely predates al-Zawahiri's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, al-Qurashi is in part sounding al-Zawahiri's call for jihadist discipline and in part laying the groundwork for his other articles, such as "Al-Qaeda's Art of War" and "Fourth-Generation Warfare."⁶ At this point, he introduces Clausewitz and Mao as historical expert witnesses for the need for political discipline by the weak in order to defeat the strong. This is a concept that al-Qaeda strategists generally emphasize. Without it, the jihadist movement can have no coherence and cannot function as a global movement. Without it, Al-Qaeda Central cannot function as the central Guidance Circle al-Suri envisioned, following al-Zawahiri's lead. In this seminal article, al-Qurashi presents six dimensions of success for revolutionary wars and therefore also for global jihad along the al-Qaeda model. These dimensions are (1) political, (2), military, (3) economic and social, (4) cultural and ideological, (5) psychological, and (6) international.

The Political Dimension

Al-Qurashi characterizes the political dimension by referring to Clausewitz and Mao Tse-tung:

Echoing what the prominent strategist Clausewitz said centuries ago, Mao Tse-tung in his writings about the revolutionary war focused on the fundamental relationship between war and politics, a relationship that subordinates military operations to political leadership. In this respect, Mao said: "War cannot diverge for one instant from politics." And he added: "Politics is war in its essence but without blood."⁷

Al-Qurashi points out that some theoreticians argue that there should be a separation between the political leadership and the revolutionary forces. The author sees terrorism as a natural part of revolutionary war, given its very nature as being a war of the weak against the strong. He emphasizes that according to Mao "all operations that the revolutionary army undertakes, especially military operations, must serve a political goal."⁸ Al-Qurashi emphasizes that terrorist operations must not be taken to extremes to avoid losing the support of the people, which constitutes the "the key to the struggle as a whole."⁹

The word "politics" in jihadist terms does not imply elections and participation in a democratic political process; rather, it is analogous to the politics of the Chinese communist party under Mao. Al-Qurashi goes on to say that military forces of the revolution need the support of a political organization even if it is physically separated from the ranks of the revolutionary military forces or part of a separate structure. This is especially true if the revolutionary movement is based in the countryside or a remote area. These forces will generally seek to establish branches inside cities. These branches may not be soldiers but will provide logistical and communications support to the rural guerrilla forces, provide counsel to prisoners before the courts, and support families of the captured guerrillas. The top political leadership of a revolution, however, in all cases

must provide leadership to the military as well, at least at the strategic level.

In introducing the example of rural revolutionary forces, al-Qurashi is thinking of the Cuban revolution and the writings of Che Guevara and Regis Debray.¹⁰ Al-Qurashi finds no consensus among theoreticians and practitioners of revolutionary or guerrilla warfare concerning the separation of political cadres from the fighters themselves. He points out that Che and Regis Debray and those who participated in the Cuban Revolution “combined political and military authority in one man, Fidel Castro.”¹¹ For al-Qurashi, another such man was Osama Bin Laden.

Al-Qurashi cites Mao’s model again and again. Politics always trumps terrorism or paramilitary attacks because the primary goal of revolutionary war is to win the support of the people. Jihadists must treat the people with respect; therefore, relying too much on terrorism is a mistake. The political dimension takes time and cannot be rushed by violence. Al-Qurashi’s final word on the political dimension describes a classic rule of successful revolution, one that al-Qaeda struggles to achieve with Muslim populations that are often skeptical of the organization’s methods and goals:

Most revolutionary movements spend some time to set up not only the local administration but also parallel governmental institutions, which act as a pivot point in the struggle for the people’s loyalty. These alternative institutions are required to give a degree of legitimacy to the revolutionary army at the same time breaking the government’s monopoly on legitimacy.

Thus, the Chinese “people’s war” (for example) witnessed the establishment of a state within a state in regions controlled by the communist forces in China.¹²

Here al-Qurashi is endowing the traditional approach of pious religious groups with the mantle of established,

successful insurgencies like Mao's. In the Middle East, many people would be familiar with the charities of the Muslim Brotherhood organization in Egypt. The people of Afghanistan would become familiar with extreme groups such as the Taliban through their services and occasional payments to families as well as their terrorist attacks. In Egypt, the Brotherhood might set up a medical clinic in a rural area or a hospital in Cairo to serve the double purpose of performing good works and gaining the people's support. The Taliban have been known to set up instant shari'ah courts to settle disputes to win the people to their side. The concept is the same: give the people simple, tangible benefits that a corrupt central government cannot provide.

Al-Qaeda's strategists after al-Qurashi make many references to concepts previously articulated in the works of strategy written by communist revolutionaries. Al-Qurashi is telling his audience that if the correct situation is chosen and senseless attacks that do not serve clear political purposes are avoided, then classic guerrilla warfare can work for jihadists against the United States and its Middle Eastern allies. Al-Qaeda has suffered setbacks by not following its own advice and allowing itself to be characterized primarily as a terrorist group by the local people whose support they need against the central government. Time and again, when al-Qaeda or other jihadist groups set off bombs in civilian areas, the residents (whether in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or Algeria) turn against the organization and begin informing authorities about the presence of jihadists in their midst. Like Mao, al-Qaeda's leaders, trainers, and propagandists proclaim their intention to avoid harming the people among whom they operate. Al-Qaeda, however, has failed to do so, and Western studies have shown that their urban bombing campaigns have killed more Muslims than non-Muslims.

The Military Dimension

To demonstrate that diverse sources and experts support his major point, al-Qurashi quotes Peter Paret, best

known as the editor of a classic compendium of scholarship on strategy.¹³ The citation, however, is to Paret's book on the French Army: "In relation to the revolution, military force plays a secondary role; the definitive factor is the support of the people which at the same time forms the primary goal and decisive means."¹⁴ Al-Qurashi does not have original things to say about guerrilla war, but he proves that he has done his homework in the classic manuals of revolution and the French experience in Vietnam and Algeria. He emphasizes that revolutionaries win not by destroying the enemy army but by a psychological war of attrition. Small attacks in different places that exhaust the enemy are essential. The guerrillas, and here we should understand "jihadists," should attack only when they can win and should retreat whenever winning is out of the question. They win by staying alive and always being the ones to choose the battle. To stay alive, of course, they need the people, who provide them with information about enemy plans, helping the guerrillas choose the best avenues for attack. Thus politics always trumps military action or terrorism.

Al-Qurashi analyzes both rural and urban guerrilla warfare (he cites both Che Guevara and Carlos Marighella); jihadists need remote camps, but they also must exist in the cities because that is where the game of politics is played, where the war of attrition has the greatest psychological effect on the central government, and where the decisive phase of revolutionary war is played out.¹⁵ The author returns again and again to Mao, noting that the rural campaign dominated the early stages of Mao's war but that over time he moved his forces, which had grown stronger, into the outskirts and then the center of the cities.

Having emphasized the priority of politics over military action, al-Qurashi informs his readers that "in any case, regardless of the environment of the struggle and the chosen methods of developing it, most revolutionary theorists agree that revolutionary wars are

divided mostly into three strategic phases.”¹⁶ The author is using the classic phases of guerrilla warfare. Revolutionary theorists of the twentieth century expressed these phases in various formulations, which arguably have nuanced differences among them. In general, however, it is safe to say that all of them have a preparatory stage, in which the guerrillas are weaker than the central government or invading army and rely on terrorism and hit-and-run tactics. In a middle phase, the revolutionaries begin to be able to face the enemy on an equal footing and have taken over large areas within a country. In the final or decisive phase, the guerrilla leadership has developed conventional forces as well as guerrillas, has consolidated gains, and moves to victory either in a decisive battle or by the collapse of enemy forces and the fall of the enemy regime.

This general scheme characterizes al-Qaeda thinking and no doubt flows from the organization’s top leadership to be articulated by al-Qaeda’s strategic authors. This three-phase formula is Maoist in its conception and has been articulated in the colorful descriptions of the *Administration of Savagery* and the more mundane words of the military bureaucrat. Al-Qurashi describes the initial stage of planning and organizing in which the guerrillas are at a strategic disadvantage and engage in many small-scale attacks. The second phase is one of strategic stalemate, in which the jihadists or revolutionaries consolidate and expand their presence in a chosen area and build stronger forces. In the final phase, the revolutionary jihadist forces emerge as a conventional military force able to mount a strategic, decisive counterattack. Following the classic advice he has studied, al-Qurashi recognizes that revolution is not driven by academic theory. History and the facts on the ground are the best guides to how revolution or jihad must proceed, and the history that al-Qurashi reviews leads to his final conclusion on the military dimension of revolutionary war: “Thus, most revolutionary theorists agree that local military victories have no value unless they help the revolutionaries

weaken the morale of the regime and increase the political pressure on it by spreading popular discontent with the regime while the war is raging.”¹⁷

In other words, without a revolution in the thinking of the people, military victory in a particular locale is meaningless and unsustainable. No coup or outside intervention can ensure the support of the people; in fact, without a lengthy political indoctrination, the people will resist the results. Thinking in military terms alone will lead to failure one way or another.

The Social and Economic Dimension

Al-Qurashi asserts that to gain the people's support and achieve what Marighella refers to as the climate of collapse it is necessary to ignite social and economic unrest within a society,¹⁸ claiming that most theorists agree this is a key dimension to revolution. Revolutionaries must exploit social and economic injustice, or at least bad conditions, to gain the people's support for revolution. They must create zones of control in which the revolution can demonstrate economic and social justice. In a significant and curious juxtaposition, al-Qurashi contrasts the views of Mao and Che Guevara, first noting Mao's belief that bad social and economic conditions must exist for the revolution to be successful. Al-Qurashi reports that both Mao and Giap emphasized the necessity of studying the social and economic conditions of a target in order to exploit those conditions and provide a contrast in areas under revolutionary control.

On the other hand, or so al-Qurashi argues, Che Guevara believed that the revolution itself could create those conditions and then exploit them. The author gives the example of Castro basing his operations in the richest coffee area of Cuba and benefitting from the revenue of what was formerly state property. Other revolutionaries could emulate such an approach and take advantage of conditions as they find them:

Similarly, revolutionaries often target economic facilities for attack with the intention of undermining the economic power of their enemies. They therefore target petroleum facilities, ports, and the means of transportation and communication, which form the economic arteries of the state, for attacks designed to spread the condition of collapse and chaos. Attacks of this type included those of the Irish Republican Army, the German Baader Meinhof group, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Basque ETA group.¹⁹

Abu Bakr Naji recommended al-Qurashi to jihadists so that they would better understand military strategy and tactics. Naji himself argued that petroleum facilities ought to be prime jihadist targets. The gangs and revolutionary groups mentioned in the passage above are a mixed group whose ideologies would not appeal to jihadists. Naji asserted that even unsuccessful attacks on petroleum facilities have the proven potential for raising the price of oil. Of course, when the price of oil goes up, generally speaking, the benefits go to the ruling House of Saud, even if Western economies suffer. Naji's concept was to take that benefit away from the Saudi rulers by making it impossible to export crude from the Arabian Peninsula. This in turn would cause grave difficulties for local communities. Naji recognized this and describes a public affairs strategy to convince ordinary people that economic dislocations in the jihad are necessary but also temporary. Regardless of multiple defeats on all fronts in this approach, there is every reason to believe that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continues to pursue this strategy. Regis Debray pointed out that the great strength for a guerrilla is tenacity, or, as al-Qaeda ideologues would say, "patience."²⁰

The Ideological and Cultural Dimension

Al-Qurashi argues that cultural conflict in a revolution is closely tied to political, social, and economic dimensions

in the target society. Ultimately, the revolution is a struggle between the cultural values of the rulers and those of the revolutionaries or the jihadists.

No doubt al-Qaeda determines its target priorities in part through a study of the gap between the rulers and the populace of a specific region. If the United States is occupying a country, the task is fairly simple for al-Qaeda. The organization can unite the Sunni Muslim populace against not only Americans but also the local government cooperating with them. This principle was evident when warring Afghan factions united against invading Soviet forces in 1979 in a spirit of classic jihad as defense against infidel invasions. Rarely is the situation so clearly cut, however.

Al-Qurashi is basing his arguments on lessons of history that he believes can be universally applied, using two examples that would resonate with his audience as areas where American will was thwarted: Vietnam and Cuba. In Vietnam, the author points out, the revolutionaries concentrated propaganda efforts on widespread corruption of every kind, including nepotism, torture, and the lack of social equality in South Vietnam. At the same time, the communist forces practiced virtues that stood in stark contrast to the failings of the South Vietnamese. Al-Qurashi goes on to argue that the Cuban revolutionaries used the same approach by taking advantage every means available to win the cultural and ideological battle. In the end, they convinced the population of their sincerity and trumped their corrupt enemies.

The Psychological Dimension

According to al-Qurashi, the psychological dimension is one of the most important dimensions of revolutionary war because it aims to win the hearts of the people. He does not use the well-worn phrase “hearts and minds” because he attempts to separate rational argument from emotion produced by propaganda. Therefore, the author points out that revolutionaries focus heavily on

propaganda techniques to pillory the existing regime and thereby win the people to the revolutionaries' side. The author cites Mao's theories on this subject as exploiting the interconnectedness of space, time, and will. He claims that Mao's doctrine teaches, for example, that the revolutionary must trade space to gain time and use time to produce the will to carry on. There are many examples that demonstrate this principle, and al-Qurashi returns to Carlos Marighella's concept of producing a "climate of collapse" as the fundamental goal of military operations. Vietnam is another example in which the revolutionaries were able to destroy civilian and enemy military morale by combining psychological warfare with military operations over a long period of time. Producing chaos (*fawda*) in the enemies' ranks was key to victory in Vietnam, according to al-Qurashi.²¹

At this point, al-Qurashi claims that the revolutionary movement basically does nothing that does not have a fundamental psychological, hence political, impact and meaning. Thus the individual revolutionary soldier is the basic propaganda instrument of the revolutionary movement. The author refers to the jihadist movement sparingly, but he clearly intends his reader to understand that the revolution is jihad and that the revolutionary soldier is a jihadist. "Thus, every battle must expose the weakness of the government army and show the bankruptcy of the ruling regime, which relies on it; the result of this is that every military battle is a speech designed to increase the revolutionary consciousness."²²

The final example of psychological warfare cited by al-Qurashi was the terrorist campaign of the IRA against the British government, especially attacks on British soil like the bombing at Brighton in 1984 "aimed at killing British ministers."²³ Al-Qurashi's history and analysis may well be questioned, but his intention was to convince susceptible young men that the IRA were romantic warriors who successfully undermined the powerful British government by means of daring attacks and not

bloody terrorists who deliberately killed innocent people to achieve political goals.

The International Dimension

International support is another key component of revolutionary war. Revolutionaries transmit propaganda beyond the borders of the target region to gain the sympathy of other countries. They portray their struggle, according to al-Qurashi, as a David-and-Goliath battle of a small group against the huge forces of corruption. The author characterizes the government by using a phrase denoting “acts of corruption in the land” (*al-afsad fi al-ard*), which Muslim readers would immediately recognize as one of crimes deserving death. Propaganda aimed at non-Muslim countries would describe a large, brutal, and unjust government against the small group seeking justice from a tyrant.

Al-Qurashi cites the example of the Vietnam War, about which General Giap wrote that revolutionary movements must mobilize international public opinion to the side of the revolutionaries. Al-Qurashi points out North Vietnam’s valuable accomplishment in simply provoking Americans to question the war’s justification. At the same time, he cautions revolutionaries against exclusive reliance on foreign aid, since this can backfire. Abu Mus’ab al-Suri drew similar lessons from the Muslim insurrection against the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Asad. On the one hand, revolutionaries need foreign support, but jihadists soon learned that Muslim states supported them against other Muslim states for their own political reasons, whether to infiltrate these movements or weaken the target state. This kind of support prevents revolutionaries from developing their own source of strength for the long struggle, and if the support is withdrawn the movement may collapse. Al-Qurashi asserts that support for Cuba and China was negligible until after the revolution was successful.

Al-Qurashi concludes that the jihadist movement has used many methods employed in revolutionary wars. He

goes on to say that jihadists won some of these wars and lost others against “Crusaders and Apostates.” It appears almost certain that al-Qurashi was referring only to jihadist operations and wars prior to 9/11.²⁴ Why did jihadists win or lose these wars? The author introduces a basic principle for al-Qaeda authors of strategic literature, that of *universal laws* (*sunan kawniyyah*) or, alternately, *universal causes* (*asbab kawniyyah*) governing human events and natural phenomena.²⁵ One may also find the use of the term “pure human reason,” to indicate that the author is not relying on the shari’ah to make a particular argument about war and politics. To avoid the clearly scientific or secular implications of “universal causes” or “universal laws” without reference to the Qur’an or *hadith*, al-Qaeda authors generally couple it with the term shari’ah, as in the phrase “shari’ah and universal laws,” without much commentary about how the two might fit together. The context generally makes it clear, however, that al-Qaeda authors are referring to the laws of reason governing human affairs to include war and politics; understanding these universal laws is not based on analysis of sacred texts. One example of universal laws is the compendium of rules of guerrilla warfare described by Mao Tse-tung. Mao’s art of guerrilla warfare is useful because it defines how the weak can defeat the strong. We will return to this concept because it opens the door for secular leaders to engage in counterarguments based on reason and experience without appealing to Islam. A reader can see this term used again and again: in the writings of Abu Bakr Naji, in the publications of AQAP a decade after 9/11, and in the first paragraph of the first article that al-Qurashi was to write for *Al-Ansar* magazine, with the eye-catching title “Al-Qaeda and the Art of War.”²⁶ The concept is also implied in Abu Mus’ab al-Suri’s caution that the lessons he has learned for jihad and the solutions he proposes to help jihadists defeat their enemies in the “long war” are products of experience and human knowledge and are not based on religious law. All of al-Qaeda’s writers will assert, however, that

their proposed actions comply with the shari'ah, but they rarely explain how universal laws and divine law come together, except in the sense that the purpose of jihad, for example, is to create a universal ummah under the shari'ah and guided by a caliph, an argument that the ends justify the means.

“AL-QAEDA AND THE ART OF WAR”

As previously indicated, “Revolutionary Wars” predated the biweekly online magazine *Al-Ansar* for which Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi was a regular contributor, starting with the first edition on January 15, 2002. Al-Qurashi's first article bore the significant title “Al-Qaeda and the Art of War.” In this article, the author uses classic books of Chinese military strategy to explain the recent events in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda's part in them:

Chinese civilization is celebrated for its extremely lustrous past and is considered among those civilizations that have bequeathed to mankind many things related to universal laws (*sunan kawniyyah*). Among those [gifts] which [China] shared were a number of books devoted specifically to war such as *The Art of War* of Sun Tzu, or the book *Seven Classic Military Problems*, or the book *Unconventional Strategy*. All of these books study the art of war among the ancient Chinese. Nevertheless, some of their lessons have not diminished with the passage of time, the advances of military technology, or the radical change in the character of war.²⁷

According to the author, the U.S. Army did not pay attention to lessons that could be learned from the history of warfare, especially after its victory in World War II. However, when it “buried its pride in the mud of the Vietnam War” it reviewed its strategy and began reading the lessons of history, including the lessons taught by Sun Tzu in his *Art of War*. Al-Qurashi points out that many Americans admired the work of the ancient Chinese author. Nevertheless, after their victory

in the “second Gulf war” (i.e., Operation Desert Storm) the Americans returned to their old ways of ignoring the strategic lessons of the past. Al-Qurashi paints a picture of a military establishment so impressed with its advanced technology that it felt the fixed rules of warfare and strategy no longer applied to it. The author’s intention was to show the strategic weakness of the Americans. Essentially, al-Qurashi is telling his presumably young Arab readers: America is rich and has formidable technology, but it can fall before a weaker force that follows the universal laws of warfare that the Americans in their pride ignore. He is not saying that the United States does not have the capacity to destroy conventional armies; he is saying that America has forgotten the lessons of Vietnam and has not prepared to fight an organization like al-Qaeda, which intends to model its way of fighting according to a method developed from studying guerrilla warfare. Al-Qurashi’s audience is well aware of al-Qaeda’s attacks on New York and Washington and America’s fierce counterattack in Afghanistan. He is writing in a theoretical vein about a concrete struggle. In 2002, few of his readers could be confident that Osama Bin Laden had done the smart thing in attacking the United States. Al-Qurashi’s task is to convince them otherwise.

In 2002, it was difficult for al-Qurashi to argue that the Americans were losing in Afghanistan. In a period of a few weeks, the United States forged alliances with the Afghan tribes, which came to be known in shorthand as the Northern Alliance, to overthrow the Taliban and drive al-Qaeda into hiding. The Americans failed to capture or kill Bin Laden, a disappointment that still did not mask the general rout of its enemies. Later, more negative assessments would come, but they focus mainly on American follow-up on initial successes and analyses of the effect of the invasion of Iraq on the war in Afghanistan. In the face of early American successes, the author turns to Sun Tzu’s lesson that an army must never allow the enemy to fight on its own terms and presents the case that America did not win the initial

battles; rather, al-Qaeda and the Taliban declined to fight on American terms. So when the Americans planned to use airpower to destroy al-Qaeda and its allies in Afghan cities, the jihadists withdrew into the countryside, and when the Americans with superior numbers sought to engage them in the countryside, they refused to engage and withdrew into the mountains to prolong the war and wait for the best time and place to counterattack.²⁸ By following this course, al-Qurashi claims that al-Qaeda was following lessons learned by studying ancient Chinese texts on unconventional warfare. In addition, the jihadists in Afghanistan, according to al-Qurashi, forced the Americans to divide their forces and thus weakened their numerical advantage. The author claims that this is the same principle first established by Sun Tzu, which was then employed by the Vietnamese against the French in 1954 in the battle of Dien Bien Phu, then again against the Americans in 1964 in the battle of Nam Dong, and finally against the Americans by the mujahedeen at the Battle of Tora Bora in 2001. While the jihadists were following these ancient lessons of Sun Tzu, al-Qurashi claims that American arrogance led them to believe that the jihadists were stupid.

Al-Qurashi's account of Afghanistan is an apologia for al-Qaeda's and the Taliban's sudden defeat by the American invasion. On the other hand, Peter Bergen's thoroughly researched description of the battle of Tora Bora certainly demonstrates that the Americans and Northern Alliance allies had insufficient numbers in the immediate area to block al-Qaeda's leadership from escaping, despite vastly superior technology and firepower, as well as the existence of additional American troops in the theater that could have been deployed to Tora Bora.²⁹ In the end, Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri escaped by ancient means: horses and a practiced knowledge of the terrain. This was certainly a disappointment to American forces; nevertheless, despite al-Qurashi's assertions to the contrary, the Taliban government was overthrown, and al-Qaeda lost its safe haven in Afghanistan in a very

short period of time. These outcomes were demoralizing to al-Qaeda, a theme that is evident in their internal writings after the fact.

Al-Qurashi tells readers not to believe what they read in the press, but he does this by relating al-Qaeda's strategy in Afghanistan to ancient Chinese writers and lessons learned from modern wars. For example, he cites "Liu Shi's"³⁰ advice: "When the enemy is more numerous and the battle is at the gates, one must deceive him so that he will not know the actual size of your army and thus will not attack boldly." Such a ruse may deter the enemy from a bold attack that would have been successful. In Afghanistan, al-Qurashi claims the Americans were always in the dark about the numbers of the jihadists and their quality as fighters. The jihadists used deception to increase American arrogance and ignorance, both harbingers of defeat.

Disinformation is a large part of al-Qaeda's strategy in Afghanistan. The author cites the example of the speeches of Osama Bin Laden, whom he describes as the "general leader." According to al-Qurashi, when Bin Laden addressed dedicated mujahedeen, his speech was designed to raise morale and urge them into battle; when addressing those with doubts about his cause, Bin Laden spoke in a fashion designed to remove doubts about the savagery of the battle against the Americans; and when addressing the enemy, America, Bin Laden could speak in such a way as to project fatigue. The message to his readers is clear: do not accept events at face value; over time you will see that al-Qaeda is following the ancient strategists, whereas Americans are relying on the arrogance of imagined power. Bin Laden is in charge and vigorous even when the press reports him to be in bad health or wounded.

"FOURTH-GENERATION WARFARE"

Thought to have been a close adviser to Bin Laden, al-Qurashi no doubt influenced the al-Qaeda leadership on occasion, in addition to presenting the leadership's

thinking to others. He might have been influential on the topic of fourth-generation warfare. His second article for *Al-Ansar*, “Fourth-Generation Warfare,” pushed the concept of an “art of war” for jihadists in general and al-Qaeda in particular into the global arena.³¹ Fourth-generation warfare, sometimes referred to as 4GW in American defense circles, is hotly debated. Al-Qurashi reports to jihadists about American thought on the subject of 4GW. The footnotes to al-Qurashi’s article are based largely on American thought, beginning with the seminal article by William S. Lind and his collaborators in 1989 and articles by Thomas X. Hammes.³² Since al-Qurashi wrote his article, Hammes has written an excellent summary of his own thoughts on 4GW, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the Twenty-First Century*.³³

Hammes gives a useful definition of 4GW that will seem like an echo chamber to anyone familiar with al-Qaeda’s tactics and strategy.

Fourth-Generation warfare (4GW) uses all available networks—political, economic, social, and military—to convince the enemy’s political decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit. It is an evolved form of insurgency. Still rooted in the fundamental precept that superior political will, when properly employed, can defeat greater economic and military power, 4GW makes use of society’s networks to carry on its fight. Unlike previous generations of warfare, it does not attempt to win by defeating the enemy’s military forces. Instead, via the networks, it directly attacks the minds of enemy decision makers to destroy the enemy’s political will. Fourth-generation wars are lengthy—measured in decades rather than months or years.³⁴

Hammes’ book is not about al-Qaeda per se, but Hammes makes it clear to his reader that he considers al-Qaeda to be a remarkable embodiment of the

principles of 4GW: “al-Qaeda understands 4GW and is using it.”³⁵ Hammes also claims that the concepts in 4GW are not new; they can be traced to Mao, although Mao never used that term.

Even before al-Qurashi wrote his article, there is evidence that al-Qaeda was studying the 4GW concept. According to Lind, copies of his 1989 article were found in the caves at Tora Bora, which suggests that it was being used in training or at least being read by the entourage around al-Qaeda’s leadership circle, if not by the leaders themselves.³⁶ Andrew Black has suggested that Abu Mus’ab al-Suri’s strategic system of global jihad reflects a development of 4GW concepts.³⁷ As we shall see in [chapter 5](#), this system has its roots in al-Suri’s thinking as early as 1990 and has by and large been adopted by al-Qaeda in the post-9/11 period. The issue had therefore been in the air for some time before al-Qurashi’s article. Al-Qurashi’s purpose is not to influence al-Qaeda but to encourage young Muslims to keep faith in al-Qaeda and Bin Laden. As usual, the author tells his readers his reason for writing in the first paragraph:

It is absurd these days the extent to which psychological defeatism has penetrated the heart of this community (ummah). It is even more perplexing that [Islamic] scholars were among the first to exhibit this malady, when it is incumbent upon the likes of them to defend this community so truth may prevail and falsehoods be stifled. In this regard, one of these specimens spoke in an interview on one of the satellite channels about the current American attack. When he began to justify withholding support from the mujahedeen, of all the falsehoods, one caught my attention: his saying that there is no parity between the power of the mujahedeen and that of America and its allies, therefore no jihad and no support for it—the matter is decided in advance in favor of America. This talk reflects the speaker’s utter ignorance concerning Islamic law, history, and current

Western military analysis, as will be clear in what follows.³⁸

Al-Qurashi takes the promised explanation that follows almost entirely from American authors on 4GW. He has chosen the effective rhetorical technique of using the arguments of the enemy, America, to prove his point that America can be defeated. In his first article, he justified events in Afghanistan using an eclectic choice of examples of Maoist strategy as interpreted by General Giap and the authors of the Cuban Revolution. In this article, he takes the battle to the global stage, using examples provided him by American defense intellectuals writing in the open press.

Al-Qurashi reflects on the Palestinian uprisings or intifada and the famous pictures of Palestinian boys throwing stones at Israeli soldiers and military equipment. He notes that “all of us have followed the news and pictures” that portrayed the Palestinian children throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at the most modern military innovations.³⁹ It is an emotional reference used to catch his readers’ attention, but he immediately capitalizes on American military experts who suggested that the intifada was a model that would be the dominant form of war in the twenty-first century. Al-Qurashi does not enter into the debate within defense circles between those who want to target 4GW as America’s main threat and those who claim that 4GW is simply a new term for an older phenomenon, insurgency, for which American forces are provided with ample funding.⁴⁰ Al-Qurashi’s goal is to demonstrate that Americans have identified a new kind of warfare in which the weak nonstate actor can defeat the strong, technologically advanced forces of great powers but that the American establishment has decided not to prepare for this kind of war. To this end, the author identifies asymmetric warfare as simply another name for 4GW and then gives examples in which he claims the former Soviet Union, the United States, Russia, and Israel have been defeated (at least temporarily) by much weaker

Muslim nonstate actors in Afghanistan, Somalia, Chechnya, and Lebanon.

Al-Qurashi recognizes that the weaker actors in all of these cases failed to win decisively in the sense that they were not able to achieve their ultimate goals. The author also acknowledges that one may argue that all his examples involve nations fighting against invading armies, which is not the case with members of al-Qaeda, who are fighting on foreign ground in Afghanistan. The author moves beyond these objections to assert that the important thing is that al-Qaeda has managed to overcome what he calls the three pillars of American defense strategy, something even the former Soviet Union failed to do. Al-Qurashi identifies these pillars as (1) early warning, (2) preemptive attack, and (3) the principle of deterrence.

With September 11, according to the author, al-Qaeda wrote itself onto the short list of those who were able to carry off devastating surprise attacks on a strong foreign power. Others on al-Qurashi's list are the Japanese (for their attack on Pearl Harbor), the Nazis (for their invasion of the USSR), the Soviets (for their invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968), and the Egyptians (for their crossing of the Suez Canal in 1973). The author's point is to remind his readers that al-Qaeda has already accomplished a remarkable feat despite the overwhelming power of the United States. He argues that the American military should have been ready in every sense for terrorist attacks after experiencing the "destruction" of the USS *Cole* in 2000, but nevertheless al-Qaeda has succeeded in inflicting serious psychological and economic impacts on American society. If the first pillar—early warning—fails, preemptive attack is, of course, out of the question. The third pillar, deterrence, does not work with jihadists who are ready to give up their lives. Furthermore, deterrence depends on both parties' respective interest in survival. Al-Qurashi asks how an organization that does not depend on the West or on the existence of a fixed

headquarters, banks, or any of the trappings of a state can be deterred by a strike on its interests. This is the essence of the fourth-generation warfare that al-Qurashi is championing. Al-Qaeda has the ability to use the media to good effect, just as the intifada did. All these assertions, of course, ring hollow when one reads the candid statements of strategists like Naji and al-Suri, both of whom recognized the overwhelming threat that the United States and its allies posed for al-Qaeda in all spheres. Al-Qurashi's mission is different. He exaggerates al-Qaeda's advantages and underestimates U.S. power to persuade a doubtful public that an al-Qaeda victory is possible. His other articles for *Al-Ansar* focus on similar goals and an unambiguous message:

- Al-Qaeda is following a lethal combination of classic, successful strategy and the newest thinking on the subject by the Americans themselves
- America has serious weaknesses, which can be exploited by a transnational Islamic insurgency: it does not know its enemy and does not know how to fight it
- Al-Qaeda is following a combination of divine law given by Allah and the universal laws of politics and warfare perceived by human reason

Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi continues his theme of the weakness of America and the strength of al-Qaeda in a number of his other articles. For example, in his "The Eyes of America" ("*Uyun Amrika*") he continues with the theme that al-Qaeda was able to overcome the principle of early warning in its raid on New York.⁴¹ Previously, citing American experts, the author had argued that the American military was stuck in a third-generation-war strategy in a 4GW world.⁴² In "Eyes," al-Qurashi argues that American intelligence agencies, especially al-Qaeda's nemesis, the CIA, are incompetent. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, America revamped its intelligence system, but after 9/11, according to al-

Qurashi, no such reorganization occurred. (Writing in 2002, he did not foresee the major U.S. government reorganizations that would occur.) He sarcastically asserts that American intelligence is only good for funding Hollywood films about imagined intelligence victories. According to al-Qurashi, one of the reasons for this failure by the CIA and others is their reliance on Arab and other Western intelligence agencies. He continues his argument that advanced technology does not translate into a recipe for victory by pointing out the vast resources devoted to American strategic intelligence. He attacks the human element by criticizing the workforce in the CIA, FBI, and State Department. He argues, contrary to fact, for example, that CIA employees do not want to live in hard circumstances in Afghanistan but would prefer to live in luxury in Virginia. There is no doubt that al-Qurashi is a student of strategy and the United States, but his talents are devoted to propaganda. Unlike Naji or al-Suri, he is less than candid about the shortcomings of jihadists and misrepresents the strength of the United States.

In his article “America’s Nightmares,” al-Qurashi details some of the threats that al-Qaeda can pose to America.⁴³ In each instance, he gives a description of the threat. In 2002, some of his material must have been new to his readers.

1. Weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons
2. Attacks on ships similar to the attack on the *USS Cole*
3. Attacks on oil tankers to raise the price of oil and hurt the U.S. economy
4. Cyber warfare
5. Cooperation with organized crime

Al-Qurashi follows a familiar pattern established in his first articles for *Al-Ansar*. He provides information about the well-known strength of the United States, which had

already instilled something like despair in the minds of would-be jihadists. In this article, he asserts that the United States spends more on security than all its enemies and unaligned countries altogether. Then he pivots to Western studies about holes in the fabric of American strength, either real or imagined. It is enough to know that these threats to American security create a sense of horror in American minds. In keeping with the 4GW strategy he has been espousing, al-Qurashi has been informing his readers that the key weapons in jihad are propaganda and political objectives. Any action that attacks the psychology of the American public is worthy of consideration. Concerning nuclear weapons, al-Qurashi is clear:

This specter will continue constantly to oppress the American people, even though many of the sons of the Islamic movement, perhaps because they are narrow minded, consider this option to be a product of the imagination. But the reality is otherwise because great quantities of materials suitable for manufacturing an atomic bomb are deemed “lost” every year, especially in countries of the former Soviet Union.⁴⁴

The author continues in this vein. He spouts the false conventional wisdom that anyone with the proper materials and scientific training can make an atomic bomb. On the other hand, if you do not believe that, he cites reports that man-portable atomic weapons were produced in the Soviet Union for intelligence officers to deploy. After the fall of the Soviet Union, a number of these disappeared, as he says “without explanation.” So, obtaining a nuclear weapon to deploy in the United States is “difficult, but not impossible.”⁴⁵ It makes little difference that al-Qurashi’s assertions are at best highly doubtful; it only matters that his readers believe them, which is a much easier proposition. There is no doubt that al-Qurashi is correct that a nuclear attack on the United States is within the realm of possibility, most likely not from a military bomb but from a dirty bomb or an

attack on a nuclear facility. Al-Qurashi is not specific, so his audience may suspect that this is no more than propaganda; instead of specifics, he suggests that some kind of nuclear or chemical attack is something Americans fear.

The other areas are familiar by now, and the author adds nothing new to the list. In fact, as in most of his articles, he relies on Americans or Europeans to give him his ideas. Maritime or pirate attacks are already familiar to his audience, and it is only a step to attacks on massive oil tankers as a method of raising the price of oil. Cyber warfare in his thinking is nothing more than the kinds of hacking events that are familiar to all users of the Internet. He also mentions the usefulness of the Internet in getting practical information about bomb making and other tools of terrorism and anarchy. Finally, jihadist cooperation with organized crime focuses on the usefulness of counterfeiting American currency as a way to weaken the American economy over time.

By the fourth edition of *Al-Ansar*, al-Qurashi demonstrates that he has been reading and taking the proponents of 4GW seriously by analyzing terrorist attacks in terms of propaganda and political objectives rather than conventional military objectives. His article "From Munich to New York" compares the Black September Palestinian attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich to the 9/11 attack.⁴⁶ In Munich, eight Palestinian terrorists killed two Israelis before taking an additional nine hostage. In an ill-conceived and poorly executed rescue attempt by German security forces, all nine Israeli hostages and five Palestinians were killed, along with a German policeman. Al-Qurashi points out that at first the terrorist attack appeared to be a total failure because none of the terrorist demands were met, all the Black September terrorists were either killed or captured, and the Palestinian movement suffered in international public opinion as a result. In retrospect, however, the author claims that the attack was a tremendous success

because the journalists present at the Olympics ended up reporting on the Palestinian cause to about a quarter of the world's population.

Al-Qurashi explains why he linked the Black September attack with the 9/11 terrorist attack, despite their differences. The Munich attack was undertaken for limited nationalistic goals but provided a propaganda victory, whereas 9/11 was undertaken for international propaganda goals. The "Munich operation" was undertaken in the environment of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, whereas "the New York Raid" was undertaken in the new environment of American dominance of the world scene. According to the author, the 9/11 attacks had expansive goals that aimed at nothing less than restoring the glory of the Arabs and Islam.

The author of "From Munich to New York" also claims that the "raid on New York" was intended to move the United States from what was a "cold war" with Islam to a hot war. By implication, he is arguing that Osama Bin Laden was inviting a direct American response. Al-Qaeda's authors generally describe the Cold War as an era in which both superpowers used proxy governments to achieve their goals. The proxies did the fighting, and the superpowers avoided direct military confrontation except in the shadow wars that were a constant feature of the Cold War. (Jihadists avoid the conclusion that the United States and its strategic partners Saudi Arabia and Pakistan used the mujahedeen as proxies against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, which might diminish the mythology of the mujahedeen standing alone against the formidable Soviet army.) By attacking the United States, Bin Laden intended to break the Cold War model by goading the United States into direct confrontation with al-Qaeda and the Taliban so he could make the false claim that America is at war with Islam. It is also clear that al-Qurashi wants his readers to see this asymmetric warfare or 4GW as a winnable strategy of the most modern type, in fact a war that will be written into the

history books as the story of how the oppressed Muslims of the world defeated the remaining superpower.

Al-Qurashi identified five major types of asymmetries between al-Qaeda and the United States:

1. The two sides are asymmetrical in terms of power. America has overwhelming power in all dimensions, land, air, and sea; jihadists have only small forces. On the other hand, al-Qaeda is clever and possesses great determination.

2. The two sides are asymmetrical in terms of information because America has the ability to obtain and transmit any information it needs, a capability that is crucial to high-tech warfare of the kind for which the United States is widely recognized as the most powerful military the world has seen. Yet the author writes that America has already lost the information war because the New York “raid” resulted in scenes of destruction of the symbols of America’s economic power being broadcast around the world at no cost to the attackers. The resulting scenes demonstrated the fragility of American power and the U.S. economy.

3. The two sides are also asymmetrical in terms of framework or scope because America speaks on behalf of states but al-Qaeda speaks on behalf of the masses and because America traces its authority to democracy whereas al-Qaeda traces its authority to the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

4. The two sides are asymmetrical in terms of space because America desires to dominate regions in order to impose its rule on them, while the al-Qaeda organization wishes to spread across the earth without consideration of borders and to attack when and how it chooses.

5. Finally, the two sides are asymmetrical in terms of time because America lives in the present, while al-Qaeda is fixed on the future. The author claims that this asymmetry allows al-Qaeda to use America’s capabilities

against it because al-Qaeda knows the mentality of the American society, whereas the reverse is not the case.⁴⁷

Identifying these asymmetries is intended to show how the weak may defeat even the strongest by pointing to the advantages of the use of 4GW by al-Qaeda and the other jihadists that may be allied with the organization at any given time.

The author returns to the attack on Israelis at the Munich Olympics, describing it as a tremendous propaganda coup that forced the world to pay attention to Palestinian anger. Therefore, although no state would support Palestinian terrorism, more states recognized the PLO than recognized Israel. (Al-Qurashi claimed in 2002 that eighty-six countries recognized the PLO but that only seventy-two countries recognized Israel.)⁴⁸ Similarly, the propaganda coup of 9/11 raised the issue of al-Qaeda to the attention of the world community, despite nearly universal condemnation by that community.

Al-Qurashi argues that the lack of support by the world community for the jihadist enterprise should not be a concern to fellow Muslims because, despite appearances, it is not a sign of jihadist weakness. World sympathy for the Palestinians did not protect them from attacks, and similarly sympathy for jihad will not protect Muslims from attacks by the United States and its allies. In addition, lack of world support is actually a strength, not a weakness, because al-Qaeda is spared from dependency on state support and therefore need not make concessions or compromises, which is a trap some resistance movements fall into, according to this logic.

Al-Qurashi asserts that the jihadist project does need international Muslim support to succeed. However, obtaining this support is one of the motives of the magazine for which he is writing. He states what he wants his reader to conclude about the intention behind

the 9/11 attacks: “Some analysts think that the immediate goal of the New York raid was to demolish the many idols, which have become established in the imagination of the masses and to wake up the people from their indifference, and that is what in fact happened.”⁴⁹

The first destroyed idol was America’s highly celebrated technical surveillance systems that, despite the expenditure of millions of dollars, were of no help in detecting “nineteen Jihadists armed with knives.” The next failure by America was in “marketing” the war. The author claims that Americans could not even find an appropriate name for their response to 9/11: whether it was a “Crusade” or “Infinite Justice,” neither had the desired propaganda effect.⁵⁰ Al-Qurashi also claims that the ummah resists globalization. Although he does not argue his point clearly, he apparently assumes his reader sees the Twin Towers as symbols of globalization and the economic power behind it. After pointing out that globalization and its enabling technology cannot overcome the power of culture, he goes on to assert that the West does not understand the power of Muslim faith and culture. Moreover, since we are following an argument about treating real buildings and real people as false idols and symbols, al-Qurashi goes on to describe the jihadist symbols he considers to have lasting value and the Western symbols of power and superiority that were destroyed:

- That symbols [of jihad] did not lose their value. This Shaykh, Osama Bin Laden, became the symbol [or icon] of the oppressed of the earth East and West even for non-Muslims.
- That the volume [of the output] of the Western propaganda machine did not prevent the attack by Shaykh Osama in what resembles a move in judo: Westerners were accustomed to witnessing the tragedies of others—on September 11, the opposite occurred.

- That the network community and e-commerce is very sensitive and fear spreads through them extremely rapidly like a computer virus.⁵¹

Al-Qurashi concludes “From Munich to New York” with the observation that terrorist groups grew dramatically after the Munich attack. He asserts that there is no doubt that the “New York Raid” will have an even greater effect on the growth of terrorism because of the significantly greater political, military, and economic damage done in America than in Munich, especially if the resistance is *escalated and continued in the heart of America*.

The remarkable aspect of al-Qurashi’s articles for *Al-Ansar* is how they echo forward and backward in time. Bin Laden had told Hamid Mir in an interview on November 8, 2001, that the real targets of 9/11 were “America’s icons of military and economic power.” Abu Mus’ab al-Suri would refer to Osama Bin Laden as the “icon of jihad.” Spreading destruction in the heart of America reflects both al-Zawahiri’s injunction in *Knights 1* as well as the theories of al-Suri and Naji. Terms like the “oppressed of the earth” reflect not only a well-known phrase from the Qur’an but also al-Qaeda’s inheritance of leftist rhetoric both from the Palestinian movement and from the books of communist revolutionaries like Che Guevara. In addition, many Afghan Arabs were exposed to the book *The War of the Oppressed*, the Arabic translation of *The War of the Flea*, in the al-Qaeda training facilities in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Al-Qaeda’s propaganda outlets used the title “War of the Oppressed” in videos showing apparently victorious jihadist guerrillas.⁵² Al-Qaeda’s rhetoric, which so often seems weak when translated into English, carries multiple layers of meaning in Arabic that reflect the most ancient and more modern experiences of the Muslim Arab community. After the initial articles described above, al-Qurashi stayed on message. Much of what he wrote for the online magazine *Al-Ansar* analyzes examples of how the principles of war followed by al-

Qaeda will lead to victory or how the United States is in some way incompetent and bumbling.

Al-Ansar published twenty-eight volumes between January 2002 and April 2003. Today they are recoverable on an Internet library of jihadist historical documents.⁵³ Each volume follows the same format, containing sections on religious issues, strategic studies, political analysis, and a wrap-up of contemporary news. The remaining articles written by al-Qurashi for this magazine and the now defunct older website al-Uswa al-Hasana (The Excellent Model) could provide material for another book. Other topics al-Qurashi explored in *Al-Ansar* include Iraq, Gaza, the West Bank, Kashmir, Russia, and Algeria. The author also wrote one article on the American strategic interest in petroleum associated with the Caspian Sea and Central Asian countries and additional articles on the U.S. approach to war.⁵⁴ In his other articles written during 2002 and 2003, Al-Qurashi, like his fellow authors in *Al-Ansar*, followed the general strategic guidelines that Ayman al-Zawahiri recommended in *Knights*¹. Al-Qurashi wrote his last article in April 2003 and then seems to have disappeared. This was approximately one month before al-Qaeda launched its jihad inside Saudi Arabia. Did al-Qurashi simply adopt another alias or revert to his actual name at the end of the *Al-Ansar* publication? Did he travel to the Arabian Peninsula to be killed along with many other al-Qaeda leaders inside Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004? Or was he killed in Iraq? We do not know at this time. We do know that his writings were a strong influence on the author of *The Administration of Savagery*, which still serves as the strategic overview of how and why al-Qaeda proposes to fight an “open-front” insurgency.⁵⁵ During most of the time al-Qurashi was writing for *Al-Ansar*, al-Qaeda regional operatives and al-Qaeda’s high command were preparing for jihad inside Saudi Arabia and debating the timing of its launch. Before turning to two of the original strategists and leaders of the jihad in Saudi Arabia, Yusuf al-Uyayri and Abd al-Aziz Muqrin, it would be useful to look at one last

article of Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi that tries to project the trends in al-Qaeda's war with America and its allies on a global scale.

In "America and the Crusader Campaign: Where To?" al-Qurashi begins with a sweeping view of international agreements intended to establish new frames of reference for international relations.⁵⁶ To show that such attempts did not succeed and that their influence has diminished in modern times, he cites the examples of the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the Congress of Vienna (1815), and Yalta (1945). According to the author, the peace of Westphalia lasted for 150 years and Vienna for one hundred years, but Yalta produced nothing but forty years of Cold War. By his measurement, international diplomacy is a total failure. The "New World Order" of America, according to al-Qurashi, is no different and will have a short life, especially because it antagonized the entire Muslim population of the world at its inception. The author provides the now standard jihadist equation between America's foreign policy and the "war on Islam."

To counter the American "New World Order," the author suggests to the jihadist community (with "al-Qaeda at its head") four possible threats it can pose to the United States and its allies:

1. Direct threat to America. Direct threats include attacks on American citizens inside the United States (e.g., the World Trade Center in 1993 and on 9/11). This kind of attack is especially important, according to the author, after the stationing of U.S. troops in the Arabian Peninsula. Other direct threats include attacks on Americans abroad (e.g., attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the attack on the USS *Cole*).

2. Indirect threat to America. This category includes attacks on American allies across the world but especially against Israel, which is considered the cutting edge. The author claims an attack on Israel would bring

an American response, which in turn would unite the Muslim community against the United States.

3. Threat to the international political status quo. The political status quo according to al-Qurashi is characterized by the post–Cold War efforts of the United States to gain hegemony over the entire world by reshaping the political map. American geopolitical theorists concluded that control over an arc from the Balkans through Central Asia would result in world domination. America expanded NATO, formed a new alliance with Russia, and even tried to draw China into the mix with an eye to controlling this area while dominating the petroleum sources of the “Gulf” and Central Asia. Into this situation, the jihadist movement headed by al-Qaeda appeared as an obstacle to America’s “expansionist binge.” Al-Qurashi goes on to list the countries where the jihadist movement has been active by listing almost every country with an Islamist movement since the late eighties in the Middle East and North Africa, the Balkans, and Central and South Asia.

4. Threat to the military status quo. The strategy that jihadists follow in both the East and West, according to the author, is for the most part to employ an asymmetrical approach instead of a conventional military strategy. Al-Qurashi claims that this is the approach taken over the last two decades by “Muslim combatants” in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia, South Lebanon, and “Palestine.” This approach has caused a large amount of casualties among the “enemy” and has thrown “Western strategy into confusion.” This confusion and ineffectiveness either as a response or deterrence is especially true of the United States, according to the author. Once again, al-Qurashi is following the propaganda theme: America can be beaten.

Next, al-Qurashi analyzes the American response to this multilayered threat by citing the research of institutions devoted to strategic studies, which tried to

analyze the strategy behind the American response to 9/11.⁵⁷ The author states that a review of such studies (and here he means American articles and speeches) leads one to say that there are three axes to the American counterterrorism strategy. Al-Qurashi refers to these axes as the “external axis,” the “internal axis,” and the “military axis.”

Before describing these axes, al-Qurashi reviews what he always portrays as America’s dismal record on dealing with terrorism and asymmetric warfare. The author uses the example of the American response to the Libyan terrorist attack that targeted American soldiers in a Berlin nightclub in 1986.⁵⁸ President Reagan ordered a massive retaliation, using airstrikes on Libya. Al-Qurashi claims that the attacks did not deter Libya, which continued to engage heavily in international terrorism in the years after the attack. The author goes on to say that America’s response to attacks on its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 was weak.⁵⁹ Al-Qurashi does not believe that the response to the 9/11 attacks will turn out any better for the United States.

As he begins analyzing America’s response to 9/11, al-Qurashi first addresses what he refers to as the “external axis.” He asserts that America’s grand strategy calls for a coalition with NATO, Russia, India, Japan, South Korea, and Israel—and even China—to be of some assistance in fighting jihadists. Al-Qurashi is trying to convince his readers that the United States has declared war on ordinary Muslims, not just on al-Qaeda. Therefore, al-Qaeda is defending Muslims from the United States, not trying to create a revolution. Ordinary Muslims generally do not want to become jihadists, but if al-Qaeda can obtain their sympathy at least, he would be doing a great service to al-Qaeda’s international efforts, especially if a few wealthy individuals are inspired to give al-Qaeda money. “If everybody is al-Qaeda, you might as well join” seems to be his subliminal message. He then predicts that the United States will try to appear to be more balanced concerning the Arab-Israeli dispute

and the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India to win the “hearts and minds” of both the Arabs and Muslims. These moves, according to al-Qurashi, are recommended by American experts to persuade Arabs and Muslims not to join the resistance against the “Crusader campaign.”

Next, al-Qurashi touches briefly on what he calls the “internal axis,” which refers to the steps the United States has taken to improve homeland security, as recommended by what he calls “experts.” These steps include information security, reviews of immigration and residency laws, and the coordination of various security and intelligence agencies. At the same time, the author points out “the experts stress in their recommendations the necessity of maintaining the climate of freedom provided by the Constitution.”

Finally, the “military axis” in America’s plans involves a rapid, decisive defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan followed by “propping up a client government” there. Next, according to the author, the United States will embark on wars against “strong Jihadist organizations across the world such as in Chechnya, the Philippines, etc.” In order to carry out this strategy, the United States needs the cooperation of a large number of countries. But what is the result?

Al-Qurashi proceeds to argue that despite all press to the contrary, the American strategy is facing strategic failure because of its inability to obtain China’s cooperation against Islam. Instead of helping America, according to al-Qurashi, China is working to keep Pakistan from serving the strategic interests of the United States by “influencing some of the centers of power in the Pakistani regime.”⁶⁰ Al-Qurashi then pivots to America’s supposed strategy of moderating its stance toward Israel in order to get closer to the Muslim people. According to his analysis, America did not listen to its “experts” and act as an honest broker in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Instead, the author claims that the United States was complicit in Ariel Sharon’s shedding of innocent

Muslim blood, which increased the anger of the people in the region toward the United States. Similarly, al-Qurashi claims that America's position on Kashmir embarrassed even those fully devoted to acting for American interests inside Pakistan. Even though Pakistan is the most important country for the success of the United States' war in Afghanistan, the U.S. stance on Kashmir served only to anger the Pakistani people and their government. All this taken together pushed "winning the hearts and minds of Arabs and Muslims even farther away than before," according to the author. In all of his critique of the "external axis" al-Qurashi emphasizes what he wants his audience to recognize: al-Qaeda's political and propaganda victories.

Next, the author returns to the "internal axis" to show that the United States has been a great failure in securing its internal security as well. Here he takes a line that can be traced through al-Zawahiri back to Sayyid Qutb: America is not the land of promise and should not be admired for its own sake. In this argument, he hits two themes that resonate throughout al-Qaeda's strategic literature: (1) Muslims should not respect or fear America, and (2) al-Qaeda can defeat America by forcing it to overextend and overspend. Al-Qurashi points out that reforming homeland security has imposed heavy economic and political costs on the United States. The author points out the high price of the security measures that were taken after 9/11, which he estimates to have cost tens of billions of dollars by the time he was writing in 2002. In political terms, al-Qurashi claims that the costs have been high for the United States because it has forsaken "the spirit that it invokes." He cites unnamed American politicians to assert that homeland security has effectively moved the United States toward establishing a totalitarian state and restricting freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. And "this openly contradicts," he claims, "the official slogan that describes the Crusader campaign as a war of freedom against evil."

In his critique of American military efforts against al-Qaeda, al-Qurashi claims the “military aspect is endless.” He claims that even though America is boastful about its forces it has not claimed victory anywhere over the mujahedeen despite its strong intention to do so. The author further claims that the United States is not doing well in Afghanistan, where the reality is different from the American story; nor are its forces enjoying any success in the Philippines against the Abu Sayyaf Group or anywhere else. In 2002, it is hard to see that such a statement could be given any credence by his audience. However, because al-Qurashi is left without any convincing examples of American military failures, he can state only generally that global strategic attacks by the United States against jihadist movements and their leader, al-Qaeda, have been ineffective. Al-Qurashi ends his article by asserting that the masses of people in the Muslim community have moved from “doubt to certainty that the Crusader campaign will be destroyed soon or after a few years.”

Al Qurashi’s writings provide a good background to the al-Qaeda strategists who followed him. Although his writings are intended to achieve a specific propaganda outcome for al-Qaeda, they are well documented and provide sympathetic readers food for thought about the coming war with the United States. His arguments about 4GW likely brought new ideas to his audience. More importantly, his description of al-Qaeda’s approach to war appears accurate and reveals an ultramodern approach to war masked in the trappings of a strict traditional interpretation of Islam. As we read through other al-Qaeda strategists’ writings, we will see just how important obtaining the support of ordinary Muslims is for al-Qaeda’s jihad. The minimal success they achieved in this regard indicates that Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri in isolation knew more about the United States and its way of war than they did about the hopes and desires of ordinary Muslims from whom they had become estranged over the years.

ABD AL-AZIZ AL-MUQRIN: URBAN GUERRILLA AND THEORIST

If one were to search for a model of what al-Suri calls an aptitude or talent for terrorism, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin would serve that role. Norman Cigar, a U.S. Marine Corps expert on strategy, considers al-Muqrin's book, *Dawrah al-Tanfidih wa Harb al-Asabat* (*A Practical Course for Guerrilla War*) to be the "capstone document" of the original AQAP's military doctrinal architecture.⁶¹ Al-Muqrin's work is a unique blend of al-Qaeda's tactics and strategy, written by a man with extensive practical experience in al-Qaeda. Like a number of the documents produced by al-Qaeda strategists, this book was used to train the organization's members and recruits. Al-Muqrin used it in courses in both Afghanistan and clandestine locations in Saudi Arabia. Sections of it were no doubt taken in whole or in part from al-Muqrin's mentor and leader, Yusuf al-Uyayri, and other al-Qaeda veterans.⁶² American military manuals influenced parts of this work, as did theories of Maoist-style guerrilla warfare. It is important because it is perhaps the best concise account of al-Qaeda's military doctrine available, and we know it was used in pursuit of al-Qaeda's goals in al-Qaeda's highest regional priority, Saudi Arabia. Before turning to a description of al-Muqrin's manual, we will look at what is known of the author's life and the context of the book's production and use during al-Qaeda's jihad in Saudi Arabia beginning in 2003.

Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin's Jihadist Evolution

Born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 1973, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin was devoted to violent jihad from his youth until his death at the hands of Saudi security forces on June 18, 2004. By the time of his death, he had risen to be the leader of al-Qaeda's terrorism campaign inside Saudi Arabia (2003–2006).⁶³ He was probably promoted to a position for which he was not really suited; nevertheless, his road to it along the path of jihad was long, and he had touched all the bases in becoming a midlevel al-Qaeda leader. We can be confident in light of his

background moving up al-Qaeda's ranks that he represented the political-military thinking of the organization from the top down.

Al-Muqrin was interested in going to jihad in Afghanistan from at least the age of seventeen, when he left school. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989, most of Saudi Arabia's religious scholars (whose collective opinions can carry the moral force of law) did not view the tribal civil war there to be a defensive jihad for Saudi citizens. As a result, young men who wanted to answer the call to jihad against the post-Soviet Afghan government needed to obtain the consent of their parents. Because he could not obtain his parents' permission, al-Muqrin evidently shopped for a scholar who would issue an opinion that going to Afghanistan to train for jihad was an individual duty for a Muslim and as such did not need parental permission.⁶⁴

After obtaining the religious opinion he needed, the seventeen-year-old traveled to Afghanistan in 1990, where he saw combat and received extensive training at the infamous al-Farouq camp, which became one of al-Qaeda's basic training camps. According to *The 9/11 Commission Report*, at least seven of the Saudi "muscle hijackers" received vetting and training at al-Farouq, apparently because of its proximity to Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders.⁶⁵ Young jihad seekers would receive rigorous physical drills and training on a variety of commonplace weapons such as the AK-47 and explosives like C-4.⁶⁶ It is reasonable to assume that while in Afghanistan al-Muqrin also received training in basic field military-intelligence tradecraft and grounding in guerrilla warfare strategy.

L'Houssain Kherchtou, a Moroccan member of al-Qaeda who was trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan about the time that al-Muqrin was there, testified in a trial in New York that an American trainer, Mohamed al-Amriki (Mohamed the American), trained al-Qaeda recruits in surveillance, such as the use of cameras and other skills that would be used in any planning for an

attack. The trainer, whose real name was Ali Mohamed, was a former U.S. Army sergeant who served at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, in the late 1980s, so his knowledge would have been standard American military practices when he taught in the early 1990s.⁶⁷ Like Kherchtou, al-Muqrin travelled to Pakistan and Afghanistan for jihad training in his late teens, and the indoctrination he received there defined his life. As we shall see, al-Muqrin taught both urban and rural guerrilla warfare when he joined AQAP, an organization he helped found. Afghanistan was the training base for rural and urban guerrilla warfare, and Pakistan provided opportunities for field exercises in large urban centers.

When al-Muqrin returned to Saudi Arabia the first time, he was probably already hostile to its government. He blended his violent, criminal tendencies with a radical view of his religion, all imbedded in al-Qaeda's ideology. One incident illustrates his hostility and tendency to violence. As the story goes, one day Saudi officials who wanted to ask him some questions approached al-Muqrin in his capacity as a dealer in the date trade. His immediate reaction was to attack these officials with an iron bar before making his escape in a car. Jihadists like al-Muqrin tended to avoid taking money from the Saudi state, preferring instead to participate in trade, in emulation of the Prophet. Also, these men could look to stories of their medieval hero Ibn Taymiyyah, who avoided taking money from princes because he could not determine whether the money had been legally obtained. It is safe to assume that such men might react negatively to government officials even before they became engaged in active insurgency. For al-Muqrin, such a reaction led to direct action, which allowed him to escape conversation with officials who might simply have wanted to ask him about a permit. His violent reaction contrasts with that of Muhammad Bouazizi, the Tunisian vegetable seller whose wares were confiscated by police because he did not have a paid permit in December 2010. After the same police insulted him when he complained, Bouazizi burned himself in public. His act

ignited the anger of the Tunisian public and sparked what became the Arab Spring. His self-immolation was a highly symbolic act of political resistance by someone who was truly one of the oppressed. Al-Muqrin's act was not intended as a symbol; it was the act of a young man who was in no sense economically oppressed. His anger was the anger of the ideologue, and it produced no known political outcome. Highly intelligent and articulate in a straightforward fashion, al-Muqrin was well suited for the role he was to take in leading the most active cell in the coming jihad within Saudi Arabia. He was less well suited to creating the political circumstances that could earn the populace's respect.

Before insurrection against the Saudi state was confirmed as al-Qaeda policy, al-Muqrin put his Afghan training to use and gained experience in several areas of the world in which jihadists supported guerrilla operations. In the mid-nineties, for example, he smuggled arms between Spain and Morocco before moving to Algeria to join the jihadist campaign there.⁶⁸ He returned to Saudi Arabia after being arrested in Algeria but was still able to move back and forth between Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, no doubt sharpening his skills and cementing his relationship with high-ranking al-Qaeda leaders. Al-Muqrin must have been considered a talent in jihadist circles by this time because he was asked to serve as a trainer in Bosnia-Herzegovina and saw combat there as well. It was likely not a coincidence that the future leader of AQAP, Yusuf al-Uyayri, who had been a drill instructor in the al-Farouq camp and one of Bin Laden's personal bodyguards, was at that time a recruiter for young Saudis to go on jihad to Bosnia-Herzegovina. After Bosnia, al-Muqrin returned to Saudi Arabia but then moved through Yemen to Somalia and then on to the Ogaden Desert, where he fought against the Ethiopians. Again, we find Yusuf al-Uyayri in the picture, this time in the battle against the Ethiopian forces.⁶⁹ As in Algeria, al-Muqrin was captured (August 1996), but this time, according to his own account, he was put in prison for two years and seven months. He

was then extradited to Saudi Arabia and imprisoned again for the remaining two years of a four-year sentence. He was released for good behavior approximately six months before 9/11. Sometime after his release, he traveled again to al-Qaeda's "solid base" in Afghanistan, once again by way of Yemen. He is reported to have fought against the Americans at Tora Bora before escaping into Pakistan and returning to Saudi Arabia in 2002, one of approximately two hundred battle-hardened Afghan Arabs who returned to the kingdom after leaving Afghanistan.

Return to Saudi Arabia: Jihad Is Launched

When al-Muqrin arrived in Saudi Arabia in 2002, it was with a mission from the leadership of al-Qaeda. Clearly, the young man who originally went to Afghanistan to prepare for jihad had returned for the last time to pursue jihad in his home country. He met with Osama Bin Laden during this last trip. His interviewer for *Sawt al-Jihad's* second issue asked him about his relationship to Bin Laden. Al-Muqrin responded that his relationship to Bin Laden was the "relationship of a son to his father or a student to his shaykh." He referred to Bin Laden as the shaykh of the "mujahedeen" and indicated that he had pledged allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Bin Laden as the "commander along the path of jihad."⁷⁰ In the same interview, al-Muqrin indicated that he had returned to Saudi Arabia this time for no other reason than to pursue jihad against the Saudi regime, American forces, and Westerners working in the kingdom. The interviewer asked al-Muqrin about how he learned that his name had appeared on a list of nineteen men wanted by the Saudi authorities. His answer is revealing:

I was conducting a course attended by some brothers in a wadi [dry valley]. We were in a special course—a practical course in urban warfare. Afterwards, when I returned I saw that things were in an uproar and the situation was tense. When I encountered a brother, he said to me "how do you feel about what you learned from

the news?” I said: “What’s the matter?” He replied: “they put out a list and I discovered such and such and you are one of the wanted and your picture is now public ...”

I responded: “praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds!” The news settled into my heart—coldly and peacefully; then I knew and said to the brother right away: “the day I entered the land of the two holy places [Saudi Arabia] there was no way to avoid the day when our cards would be uncovered but we must try as much as possible to delay that day so that we might serve and provide for this religion.”⁷¹

Al-Muqrin’s response was not merely bravado. He was known for his fearlessness. The clandestine cell he led in Saudi Arabia was responsible for much of the violence in 2003 and 2004. At the same time, he was not interested in becoming a martyr before he accomplished his goals. As we will also see in the manual he produced for training jihadists in Saudi Arabia, he took the position that escaping in a dangerous urban environment should be a high priority. The al-Qaeda group was always short on manpower, and al-Muqrin intended to make every effort to fight on. Suicide tactics for the few people with military skills did not make sense. At the same time, al-Muqrin showed personal courage in high-risk terrorist operations, even though he knew that it was highly likely that he would be killed along the way because he had no intention of surrendering. The same issue of *Sawt al-Jihad* in which al-Muqrin’s interview first appeared also carried a eulogy and biography of Yusuf al-Uyayri, who was killed shortly after the jihad was launched at the end of May or the beginning of June. In keeping with AQAP’s doctrine and like his mentor al-Uyayri, al-Muqrin did not intend to be taken alive.

Al-Qaeda’s leadership began planning and debating the timing of the launch of jihad in Saudi Arabia as early as the fall of 2002.⁷² The leadership needed to demonstrate that al-Qaeda still had teeth after the

devastating counterattacks by American and allied forces, which had begun in 2001. Strategists of any stature state that the decision when to launch a war, guerrilla or otherwise, is one the most important decisions a revolutionary leader can make.⁷³ Jihad for al-Qaeda was the equivalent of revolutionary war. Both Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri knew that insurgents must undertake long preparation and planning before launching jihad and that the local conditions must be ripe for revolution. What the top leadership understood in this regard the midlevel leadership tasked with planning and executing the jihad in Saudi Arabia knew as well.

Strong opposing views about the timing of the launch of the jihad in Saudi Arabia developed as the al-Qaeda leadership planned the insurgency. The military and political cadres (represented by Yusuf al-Uyayri) that would carry out the insurgency were in favor of waiting until planning and preparations were in place.⁷⁴ They knew that rushing the operation could spell its doom; they wanted a much greater margin for error. Supporting the opposing view was Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Egyptian contingent surrounding Bin Laden, who were eager to begin the jihad.

It would be normal for Bin Laden to hear all sides of the issue when discussing jihad in Saudi Arabia. There is ample evidence that he made his own decisions after hearing such discussions and did not automatically agree with one faction or another among his advisers. For example, Bin Laden received many recommendations for terrorist attacks but was selective in his choices, emphasizing “quality” over “quantity”—a principle no doubt influenced by his media strategy.⁷⁵ By 1995, however, after the Saudi government cracked down on Islamists inside the kingdom, Bin Laden was more willing to support a terrorist enterprise but was hampered by a variety of practical circumstances. After the Khobar bombing on June 25, 1996, Saudi authorities arrested a large number of jihadists that Bin Laden might have used as a base for terrorist networks, including the

future founder of AQAP, Yusuf al-Uyayri. So at that point, Bin Laden did not have a viable option inside the kingdom.⁷⁶ By 1998, most if not all of those arrested after the Khobar bombing were released from prison, some of whom gravitated to al-Qaeda or returned to its service. By this time, however, Bin Laden was beginning to focus on plans for the attacks on the United States and had no intention of running an insurgency inside Saudi Arabia. In short, although al-Zawahiri was influential, it was Bin Laden and not al-Zawahiri who called the shots on operations involving the Arabian Peninsula, based on his own personal sense of the situation and his own priorities.

So, if we discard Egyptian influence as the determining factor in the timing of the launch of the jihad in Saudi Arabia, it is more likely that the perspective and priorities of the headquarters were simply different in 2002 and 2003 from those of the field. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri knew that they had lost momentum after the fall of the Taliban government in 2001 and the near destruction of al-Qaeda by American and allied forces. Al-Qaeda's leadership also needed the funding and popular support that could only come from some significant jihadist success. Consequently, they needed to act before the jihadist movement passed them by. On the other hand, the field contingent needed to win the war they were about to launch, but they knew that they were not ready to do so. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri saw that shutting down or seizing the petroleum industry in Saudi Arabia was perhaps the greatest blow they could land on the United States, and toppling the Saudi royal family would put al-Qaeda back in the forefront of the Salafist jihadist movement. Bin Laden made the decision to launch the jihad probably sometime in 2002. It was the second worst decision he made in his al-Qaeda career.

When Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin broke contact with his family in Riyadh in 2003, it was probably a signal that the decision to begin serious preparation for jihad had already been made and that he had been tasked to

begin his clandestine activities in earnest. Such a decision had been all but inevitable since August 23, 1996, when Osama Bin Laden issued his declaration of war on the United States.⁷⁷ It cited numerous grievances, but the relationship of Saudi Arabia with the United States, including the presence of American forces on Saudi soil, occupied a special place. Even if al-Muqrin did not agree with the timing of the launch of the jihad, once the decision was made he and the other conspirators became fully dedicated to the task given them.

How Al-Qaeda's Jihad In Saudi Arabia Failed

Al-Qaeda failed in its terrorist campaign inside Saudi Arabia for a number of reasons, but primarily because Bin Laden misjudged the amount of support his ideas enjoyed among the Saudi people. Thomas Hegghammer described three phases of the development of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia that overlap with but are not the same as the development of al-Qaeda's view of global jihad.⁷⁸

1. Formation of a classic jihadist movement along pan-Islamic lines from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s that supported jihad in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and elsewhere⁷⁹
2. Emergence of a global jihadist movement from the mid-1990s until 2001
3. Establishment of the original AQAP to wage war on the Western presence in Saudi Arabia

Al-Qaeda's version of jihad, referred to as "global jihad," is a form of revolution within Islam. Al-Qaeda chose to operate under a false flag when recruiting in the Gulf region to take advantage of the concept of classic jihad, which has wide support. Classic jihad means defending traditional Muslim lands from non-Muslims, and it took a pan-Islamic coloration in Saudi Arabia beginning approximately in 1979, the year of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the establishment of Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran. This pan-Islamic

orientation was sometimes marked by the tendency of some Islamic leaders in Saudi Arabia to encourage young men to travel to fight to help other Muslims in their struggles against non-Muslim forces, whether in Chechnya or Afghanistan.

Saudi Arabia is not a homogenous society, although the efforts of the Saudi royal family over the years have created the sense of Saudi citizenship within the majority of the Sunni population. The combination of Saudi Arabia's great oil wealth and the religious fervor that comes from living on the land that saw the emergence of Islam created a natural base for helping fellow Muslims throughout the world. This help has taken the form of religious instruction, philanthropic charities, and support for jihad, often all three together. For most Saudis, who are not particularly warlike, the pan-Islamic impulse mostly gravitated to charitable and humanitarian enterprises. The defense of Muslim lands meant primarily the defense of Saudi Arabia. Religious fervor among the populace, however, made supporting jihad a relatively popular idea, even if it only meant three or four weeks of training when the Saudi government made it relatively cheap for a young man to go to Afghanistan in the 1990s.

We know from numerous accounts, including the complaints of al-Qaeda members, that young Saudi men who received training in Afghanistan rarely became radicalized. Part of the reason for this was that they were mostly urban youth whose orientation to classic jihad was based on a pan-Islamic impulse that had been encouraged by preachers back home who did not agree with al-Qaeda's ideology. This remained true even though thousands of young men left Saudi Arabia to fight in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Tajikistan. Nevertheless, often the first stop for these young men was the training camps in Afghanistan. A few of them, like al-Muqrin, who did respond to al-Qaeda's radical call, were identified and given further training and indoctrination.

The vast majority of religious scholars within the Saudi system remained faithful to their rulers and enjoyed the positions and prestige that the royal family was always able to grant. Saudi Arabia itself has been a mixture of conflicting religious views that the government has balanced over time. The Sunni majority, normally identified as Wahhabi, is Salafist in its religious orientation, but Salafism in Saudi Arabia contains the full spectrum of purists, politicians, and jihadists.⁸⁰ Shortly after Bin Laden's birth in Jeddah in 1957, King Faysal opened the doors to members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were fleeing the oppression of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt. The modernizing Muslim Brotherhood had a profound effect on Saudi Arabia, as we have discussed previously. One of these effects was the emergence of the Sahwah Islamiyyah (Islamic Awakening), which became a powerful and respected movement that rivaled the government-affiliated scholars in influence. The Sahwah became the politicized version of Saudi Salafism.⁸¹ The leaders of the Sahwah movement were often critical of Saudi government positions as their popular power grew. By the mid-1990s, such opposition, including outspoken Sahwah opposition to the presence of American troops on Saudi soil, prompted the Saudi government to crack down on the Sahwah and imprison its leaders. (This was a key reason why Bin Laden admired the Sahwah movement in the 1990s.) Among those imprisoned were prominent voices that might be viewed as legitimate rivals to the authority of the Saudi establishment. Two of these voices were Salman al-Awda and Safar al-Hawali, who had attained a high status in popular opinion. By the time they were released in the late 1990s, however, they had moderated their opposition and became more accommodating of the government.

By the time that the Sahwah movement moderated its views, another conservative religious movement had moved into a position of prominence in the public's view and had become increasingly more strident. This was the Shu'aybi school of radical scholars, who rose to

prominence following the religious power vacuum created by the deaths, between 1999 and 2001, of major Salafist scholars including Abd al-Aziz Bin Baz, Nasir al-Din al-Albani, and Muhammad bin Uthaymin.⁸² Part of the Shu'aybi school's continuing radicalization (at least in public—in private they were already radical) was a natural outcome of their desire to distinguish themselves from the Sahwah movement and usurp their place in the public's mind.

From the mid-1990s, therefore, opposition religious elements existed inside Saudi Arabia that might have given Bin Laden some hope that he would find theological as well as financial support for jihadists to engage in an uprising against the royal family. Even though no one in the religious opposition openly spoke against the Saudi government, many of the Shu'aybi movement spoke harshly of the government in private. In addition, the Shu'aybi scholars encouraged young men to go on jihad in places such as Afghanistan, which was a major al-Qaeda priority at the time. Despite these encouraging signs, Bin Laden misjudged the situation on a number of levels. It was with the intention of outflanking the Sahwah movement, as well as the official Saudi religious scholars, that Shu'aybi scholars took increasingly radical stands, ones that appeared to line up with al-Qaeda's global goals. Unlike al-Qaeda, however, their tendency toward jihad, while difficult to classify with certainty, appears to adhere more closely to the classical jihadist defense of Muslim lands model rather than the global objectives of Bin Laden.

One of the Shu'aybi leaders, Nasir al-Fahd, was particularly outspoken in his hardline views, starting with his release in 1997 from three years in prison. Even al-Fahd, however, refrained from direct public attacks on the Saudi government until 9/11, when he increased his rhetoric significantly. He published a number of radical tracts and books and made public statements sharply critical of the government. For example, in one tract he accused the Saudi government of being apostate

because of its cooperation with the United States. In another he went so far as to offer a religious justification for using weapons of mass destruction against the United States in retribution for its killing of Muslims. As stated above, these views meshed perfectly with al-Qaeda's ideology and public proclamations. In addition, before the launch of al-Qaeda's attacks, the Shu'aybi scholars no doubt helped with al-Qaeda's recruitment effort by contributing to an increasingly anti-American sentiment within the kingdom and providing religious justifications for killing foreigners and the security forces of Saudi Arabia.

Despite his views, Nasir al-Fahd was not a member of al-Qaeda and was not let in on Yusuf al-Uyayri's secret plans. When the jihad was launched in May 2003, his support faltered. Before his rearrest, al-Fahd went into hiding, but he managed to make a public declaration that he was not involved with the terrorist attacks that had rocked the Saudi public. In the end, al-Qaeda could not depend on the Shu'aybi or any other significant bloc of scholars for consistent support for what became a terrorist campaign against foreigners and the Saudi government. Even al-Fahd made a televised statement condemning al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks, although he later regretted the broadcast.

Without strong religious credentials of their own, al-Qaeda could not make convincing arguments to support violence inside Saudi Arabia, especially after the American invasion of Iraq, which drew the focus of classical jihadists in Saudi Arabia, to the detriment of al-Qaeda's Saudi Arabian campaign. Just as the manpower for the insurgency dwindled as members were killed or imprisoned, the funding dwindled as well. Moreover, there was no hope of funding from al-Qaeda Central, which was strapped for funds and dependent on the same sources for funding. So, while AQAP was successful initially in drawing recruits and support and had a significant terrorist capability and significant Internet presence for propaganda, by the time the real

fighting began in the spring of 2003 it was simply not prepared to wage the protracted war its strategy demanded.

Norman Cigar has pointed out that the real failure of al-Qaeda inside Saudi Arabia was strategic, not tactical, although the execution of attacks often left much to be desired from the insurgents' point of view.⁸³ They chose to operate mainly in the urban environment, where the massive security forces of the Saudi state were most effective. They never developed the political structure inside Saudi Arabia to support the actions of the insurgency, especially in the public relations war. But most of all, as we will discuss below, the organization did not implement its own strategy.

Thomas Hegghammer argues that three factors shaped the outcome of the al-Qaeda jihad launched in 2003: the power of the Saudi state, the lack of popular support, and the Iraq War.⁸⁴ Hegghammer points out that the Saudis did not use military and security force alone but had a balanced approach that included offers of amnesty and a successful public relations effort. At the same time, Hegghammer reports that the Saudi government spent over \$30 billion on security measures between 2004 and 2006 and received significant help from the CIA and the British.

Perhaps the most significant factor, however, was George Tenet's credible warning to Crown Prince Abdullah that al-Qaeda was planning attacks on the royal family with the aim of destabilizing the government. This warning, coming on top of significant terrorist violence, apparently woke the Saudi government to the threat. The result was that the Saudi government turned on the all the spigots of national power to destroy al-Qaeda's members and organization inside the kingdom. One of the most significant uses of government power was to dominate the public dialogue about the nature of the insurgents' violence, which was killing more Muslims than non-Muslims. The fact that the presence of American forces had ceased to be a popular issue in

Saudi Arabia at this time emphasized the hollowness of al-Qaeda's claims to be in the country to fight Americans. The violence that killed ordinary citizens, including children, seemed instead to be an attack against the government and Saudi society. Classic jihadist voices outside the government made the point with great clarity by stating that if al-Qaeda really wanted to fight Americans, they should go to Iraq, where American forces actually were engaged in military operations. Moreover, popular revulsion at al-Qaeda violence led ordinary citizens to inform on the whereabouts of al-Qaeda in their midst, making government investments in revitalizing national intelligence more effective than ever before.

Over the year and a half from the beginning of the terrorist campaign inside Saudi Arabia in May 2003, the government managed to kill or capture the vast majority of al-Qaeda's leadership and its most effective fighters. The total active terrorists belonging to AQAP probably totaled no more than four or five hundred at any given time. The hard core of the leadership and fighting cadres were Saudis who had returned from Afghanistan after significant experience with al-Qaeda.

Without popular support or significant military success, al-Qaeda had no way to replenish its ranks. Its so-called jihad, lacking a political program, was reduced to a terrorist campaign. Al-Muqrin was a capable terrorist but was not sophisticated enough to be able to predict the political effect on public opinion of the videotaped beheading of an American civilian hostage, Paul Johnson, let alone attacks on Saudi policemen.⁸⁵ He died a terrorist's death in a gun battle with Saudi forces. After his death, there was no one capable of mounting an effective terrorist campaign, and it was far too late to develop a political organization or message. The insurgency sputtered along, but the government had won the war in every sense that counted by 2005. In the end, the devastation to the al-Qaeda organization in Saudi Arabia was so complete that Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri

decided a new AQAP should be reestablished in January 2009, this time in rural Yemen, where the new organization had a chance of following al-Qaeda's strategy.

The disastrous encounter with the Saudi state led to the discovery of two clear and concise documents outlining al-Qaeda's political-military doctrine and strategy as it developed in the post-9/11 period. These documents were written as training manuals to prepare recruits for the asymmetric battle not only with Saudi security forces but also with the United States, at a time when both countries were fully awake to the threat al-Qaeda posed. Although other key political preparations could not be made in the time allotted to the conspirators, these manuals were thought to be essential and could be written in a hurry. Their authors were fully knowledgeable and experienced in guerrilla warfare and al-Qaeda's adaptation of it to their ideology. Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin produced the military doctrine manual and Abu Bakr Naji wrote the strategic manual (the subject of the next chapter). Neither man lived beyond the scope of the al-Qaeda campaign in Saudi Arabia, but their books were written with an eye to making them useful to future al-Qaeda efforts. There is evidence that we will discuss in the next chapter that both the doctrine and strategy described in these two books are still being followed today by the new AQAP, this time viewing the mistakes made in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere as cautionary lessons for the new leadership.

Al-Muqrin's Description of Military Doctrine: The Strategic Context

Al-Muqrin's legacy to al-Qaeda is a manual of military doctrine, *Dawrah al-Tanfidih Wa Harb al-'Asabat* (*A Practical Course for Guerrilla War*), which is organized as a series of lessons.⁸⁶ The manual is concise and clear, comprising seventy-eight pages (in Arabic). It is divided into twelve chapters and an introduction composed of definitions of various types of war along with their causes and objectives. Each chapter is

devoted to a single topic that might be covered in a lesson. It is conceivable that the course could be taught in one or two weeks in a temporary camp in a remote area like the desert valley in which al-Muqrin taught his practical course on urban warfare, which he mentioned in his first interview with *Sawt al-Jihad*.⁸⁷ In a desert environment, however, even temporary camps were discovered by the enhanced Saudi national surveillance system. For example, in 2003 Saudi forces discovered such a camp and managed to capture at least twenty al-Qaeda members—a serious blow to an organization strapped for manpower and an intelligence coup for the Saudi government. So al-Muqrin and other trainers transitioned to teaching in urban safe houses, where they were restricted to classroom instruction using al-Muqrin's manual and other instructional aids, such as taped lectures on guerrilla war by Yusuf al-Uyayri and others.⁸⁸

As noted above, Norman Cigar, an American government expert on military strategy who translated al-Muqrin's manual and provided a commentary on it, considered this book to be the capstone of AQAP military doctrine. As such, we should think of it as a basic statement of the military doctrine of al-Qaeda in general, although it would be adapted to the circumstances prevalent in other countries where it might be applied. What is the difference between doctrine and strategy? Most military organizations have their own definitions, but they all tend to focus on a set of beliefs, definitions, and standard operating procedures adopted by a military organization. Both doctrine and strategy will also address the organization, weapons, and tactics as well as how they should be employed. If the doctrine addresses the lowest level of a military organization, it may be written in a very practical manner and address procedures. If it is written at a higher level, doctrine begins to touch on strategy and take into consideration the objectives of a large operation or the war in which it takes place. Al-Muqrin's manual uses the term "practical course." The choice of this description would indicate

that he intends to teach aspiring jihadists how to meet the goals of jihad using standard, effective practices followed throughout the organization.

After al-Muqrin's death, the book's publisher described the context and intention of the manual as follows:

Brother mujahedeen, we are beginning this blessed *Kitab Al-Battar (The Book of the Saber)* series, every one of which consists of a specialized course. Thus, one is a course on pistols, another on small arms, still another on physical conditioning, etc.

After these topics had come to you in the form of articles in the issues of the magazine *Mu'askar Al-Battar (Saber Training Camp)* God made it possible for your brothers on the military committee of the Al-Qa'ida Organization in the Arabian Peninsula to collect these issues by topic, to revise and add to some of them, and to publish them in more splendid garb so that they would be available to the lovers of martyrdom and suitors for the maidens of paradise....

This is the first volume of this blessed series of Al-Battar books, and contains the practical course on urban warfare and an introduction to the various types of wars.⁸⁹

The unsigned preface to al-Muqrin's manual also demonstrates the internal dynamics of al-Qaeda's organization, whether at the headquarters or in one of the regional affiliates. The author of the preface points out that al-Qaeda had performed a customer survey of the readers of AQAP's biweekly military periodical to decide how best to present the series of articles on the military doctrine of guerrilla warfare. Evidently, its readers preferred to see the topics arranged as individual manuals. Al-Muqrin's manual was the first in the series because he was the recently "martyred" former leader and had the most comprehensive

approach to the topic. The book series was distributed at least in part through the Internet and can still be found today scattered among various jihadist websites and commercial downloading services. The manual and book series probably served the dual purpose of a training aid to committed al-Qaeda members and a recruiting tool for impressionable young men. For that reason, it was a very professional product, which is a hallmark of al-Qaeda's productions, whether in written or video format.

Al-Qaeda takes care to know its audience and produces materials tailored to that audience. The Afghan Arabs produced a massive jihadist encyclopedia of military doctrine and instruction that was based on jihadist experience of the various wars in Afghanistan. Yet AQAP directed its readers to the newly produced material, which did not differ greatly from the topics covered already. The most likely reason for this effort was that the organization wanted to tailor it to the local situation. Basing doctrine and strategy on regional conditions is a basic premise of guerrilla warfare, as al-Qaeda's leadership has known for decades. Mao put the issue in his usual concise to-the-point fashion:

Therefore, we must study the laws of war in general, we must also study the laws of revolutionary war, and, finally, we must study the laws of China's revolutionary war.

Some people hold the wrong view, which we refuted long ago. They say that it is enough merely to study the laws of war in general, or, to put it more concretely, that it is enough merely to follow the military manuals published by the reactionary Chinese government or the reactionary academies in China.⁹⁰

One needs only to substitute "jihad" for "Chinese revolutionary war" and "infidels" for "the reactionary Chinese government" to achieve a congruence between Mao's views and the path al-Qaeda follows. Much of what al-Muqrin produced in his manual could be found in

any number of military manuals, including American manuals. How to clear a room, how to perform surveillance, or how to take out a target using small-squad tactics, for example, are not esoteric knowledge. These are basic military tasks that are essentially the same for all armed groups, although doctrine may vary among the militaries of different countries. American doctrine, for example, should be expected to be more high tech, and the tactics, techniques, and procedures may vary from those of less developed countries or countries with different social structures from the United States.

Al-Muqrin begins his manual with his premises, his perspective on the subject of war at its most general level. He defines war as a conflict between two sects, factions, states, or even individuals, but at the most general level it is between two armed camps. The purpose of war can be for political, economic, or ideological gains or expansionist goals. Echoing previous students of war, the author points out that this is generally the last card in the politicians' hand. Al-Muqrin does not clarify the odd inclusion "two individuals" in a state of war with the other as part of his definition. One may speculate that he is thinking of two tribal leaders that have armed camps answerable to them but who are not political factions or states or even distinct communities and whose conflict may be confined to a blood feud to uphold tribal concepts of honor.⁹¹ The objectives of war are defined as defeating the enemy to obtain submission or total destruction or simply to survive. Al-Muqrin categorizes the different types of wars into conventional wars, cold wars, total wars, and unconventional wars. The first three receive a rather cursory treatment because they are not the focus of operations in the Arabian Peninsula. One category, total war, he dismisses as unlikely because the widespread use of weapons of mass destruction would likely lead to the extinction of mankind.

The author gives an unconventional account of what he calls the causes of war. Instead of analyzing widely held views on why countries go to war, such as a response to blockades or retaliation for specific attacks on national interests, he proceeds to categorize the causes for what he calls just wars and unjust wars. According to al-Muqrin's account, only Muslims can wage just wars, that is, jihad. He argues that this type of war is fought either to end oppression or to ensure that the shari'ah is made the law of the land. Examples of this kind of war, the author asserts, are Saudi Arabia ("land of the two holy places"), Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Kashmir, and the Philippines. As it turned out, few citizens of Saudi Arabia agreed that it was possible to fight a just war against the Muslim rulers of Saudi Arabia. Al-Muqrin was likely relying on the excuse that al-Qaeda was waging war against Christian forces in Saudi Arabia, but the argument never convinced the populace as a whole. Unjust wars are those that unjust powers wage against the oppressed (*mustad'afina*) to extend their dominion over the beliefs of the people, replace Islamic laws (*shara'i'*), and seize their wealth.

Al-Muqrin's use of the term "the oppressed" in his definition of unjust wars provides a touchstone to the subject of his first chapter on unconventional warfare. The Arabic word he chose provides a link to a famous book in jihadist circles: Robert Taber's *The War of the Flea*, whose title in Arabic, as mentioned earlier, is *Harb al-Mustad'afina* (*The War of the Oppressed*). The war of the flea is a reference to the famous simile of Mao Tse-tung that likened guerrilla warfare to the attacks of a flea on a dog. The flea bites the dog again and again until the accumulation of small attacks leads to the death of the dog. The most prominent al-Qaeda strategists give great credit to this work in their own books on strategy. The strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri taught this book in Afghanistan for years, so hundreds of fighters that cycled through the camps were exposed to the concept and strategy of guerrilla warfare through this book. In contrast to al-Qurashi, it is unlikely that al-Muqrin read

Mao or General Giap or any of the great strategists of guerrilla warfare, but it is certain that he was exposed to Taber's book, if only through recorded lectures and training by his mentor Yusuf al-Uyayri or Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.

Al-Muqrin opens his first chapter with two definitions of unconventional war, a term he uses interchangeably with guerrilla warfare. First, he reflects one of Taber's key lessons: guerrilla war is revolutionary war. He goes on to state that revolutionary war is fought between the civilian residents of a country (or part of them) against the forces of the existing ruling powers (*sultah*), whether they are local or foreign usurpers. The revolutionaries oppose the government's political program, thinking, or legitimacy. The motivation of the revolution can be tribal or ethnic. His second definition would be known to any jihadist familiar with Taber's book, the writings of Mao Tse-tung, or the works of the architect of Vietnam's military strategy General Giap:

Second definition: a war of the poor and weak [using] the simplest forms and cheapest equipment against a strong adversary, which is superior in preparation and equipment.

It is called guerrilla warfare or "the war of the flea and the dog." The flea continually bites the dog, wounds it, and escapes; whereupon the dog begins to bite itself and scratch its skin. Then the flea returns and bites the dog again and so forth until [the dog] loses its equilibrium and [the flea] exhausts and kills it.⁹²

This definition is very close to the definition Robert Taber gives by quoting General Giap, who in turn is copying from Mao's definition: "Guerrilla war is the form of fighting by the masses of a weak and badly equipped country against an aggressive army with better equipment and techniques."⁹³

Taber emphasizes the importance of the political program for the guerrilla. The guerrilla's weakness is

predominantly a military weakness at the beginning of the revolution; his strength lies elsewhere. Regular armies, like the dog, do not have the means to counter the small, biting attacks. Their weapons are not adjusted to this nimble foe, and the accumulation of wounds is designed to exhaust its morale. In addition, Taber points out that constitutional democracies are at a disadvantage because they contain political parties and the attendant dissension that guerrillas can exploit. Taber, and all the revolutionary leaders he examines, therefore, emphasize the primacy of the political over the military. The guerrilla exists to promote a political agenda. The guerrilla cannot succeed without the people's support, and the people will support the guerrilla only after a political campaign has convinced them that the guerrillas deserve their support. Both al-Muqrin and al-Qurashi learned Taber's lesson, but the creation of a viable political movement faltered in Saudi Arabia. Al-Qaeda has no political party to fall back on and could not rely on the other political voices within Saudi Arabia, such as the Sahwah movement and the Shu'aybi scholars, whose political views had some congruence with al-Qaeda's ideology. The Saudi system was not only more powerful in military and intelligence spheres, but its government had the great advantage of enjoying legitimacy both when the jihad began and when it ended.

Al-Muqrin articulated the clear overarching goal of al-Qaeda's jihad, with which he asserts most "Islamic movements" would agree. He defines the goals in pure Salafist terms that could theoretically serve as the political program of al-Qaeda's jihad:

- A pure Islamic system of government completely free of defect and infidelity, based on the Qur'an and Sunnah (traditions of the Prophet)
- Liberation of the oppressed Muslim peoples from tyrannical, oppressive, infidel regimes, whether local or foreign

- Call for a new social system based on the shari'ah (the Qur'an and the Sunnah only)

Al-Muqrin is correct that many Salafist communities would agree to these goals, but the assertion is deceptive because most of those communities would disagree with al-Qaeda's means of achieving them. In Saudi Arabia, the majority would not agree that the government is composed of infidels or that it is based on defective premises. Even with a prolonged political campaign and an identifiable party to pursue it, it is doubtful that al-Qaeda would have been able to persuade Saudi citizens that their rulers are apostate Muslims that deserve to be overthrown, but without such a program the outcome was impossible. In addition, the political program would need to be engaged long before any terrorist attack was carried out. Exploding bombs in cities always means civilian deaths. In the midst of civilian casualties, including Saudi policemen, it proved impossible to win the people's sympathy for al-Qaeda.

Beneath these overarching goals, al-Muqrin lists four objectives that could be taken directly from Robert Taber's book or cribbed from any communist insurgency of the twentieth century, except of course that they are tailored to jihadist insurgency. These objectives, like the goals, are written universally but expressed in local terms.

1. Lengthening the war to achieve the steadfastness of the victor (*sumud al-najih*)⁹⁴
2. Obtaining combat skills that come gradually through practice, drill, and a great amount of work....
3. Achieving successful phasing of the [guerrilla war] and building forces that increase despite the enemy's superiority and its struggles to oppose that....
4. Building a military force in all parts of the country that will serve as the nucleus of a

semiconventional army....⁹⁵

In the abridged objectives of jihad quoted above, al-Muqrin somewhat cavalierly asserts that by holding out against superior forces and showing the steadfastness necessary to survive a long war, the jihadists would prove to the people that their movement is worthy of support. The author is a terrorist leader with military and organizational skills. His strong ideological beliefs inspire him but apparently give him little insight into the long political struggle it would take to win over a skeptical public. This does not mean that al-Muqrin did not fully understand the need for a strong political program to win the people. He did, but for whatever reason, he and al-Qaeda in general were unable to produce the political results they needed to prosecute a successful guerrilla war. Al-Muqrin would have made a formidable military leader under the direction of a strong political leader, but he was a catastrophe for the movement as its paramount leader with both responsibilities. The early success of the Saudi forces at killing or capturing AQAP's leadership thrust him into a leadership position that may never have suited his talents. Nevertheless, the four objectives cited above are presented in a logical fashion as interlocking parts of a whole. Students of classic communist guerrilla strategy would recognize them all.

His explanation of the first objective shows that he had a bit of a tin ear for politics except within radical jihadist circles. Al-Muqrin uses two examples of how jihadist leaders showed a steadfastness that helped prolong war to keep the guerrilla forces intact and alive. Al-Muqrin draws the first example from Tajikistan. He cites a leader identified only as Khattab, who refrained from attacking a Russian military base in a frontal assault because the Russians had three thousand soldiers, whereas the jihadists numbered only forty.⁹⁶ Instead, Khattab chose to use indirect fire on the base and lived to fight another day. While this is not a particularly strong example, one can see the point: avoid suicide attacks in a classic guerrilla war. His second

example makes less sense, as he does not give an explanation; instead he simply cites “the steadfastness of Abu Abdullah al-Shaykh Osama Bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and those Jihadists who are with them.”

In any case, all four interlocking objectives are classic guerrilla objectives. It is significant that al-Muqrin recognized that Chinese and Vietnamese guerrilla strategy requires the development of a conventional army before a guerrilla war could be brought to its ultimate stage of defeating enemy forces. Michael Scheuer called attention to the prevalence in al-Muqrin’s doctrine of the need for what Scheuer refers to as “semiconventional units” as the insurgent wars developed in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2005.⁹⁷ Scheuer also refers to al-Zawahiri’s letter to al-Zarqawi in July 2005 that implies that some sort of semiconventional force would be needed “to control Iraq after the withdrawal of the U.S.-led coalition.” Another al-Qaeda strategist, Abu Bakr Naji (see [chapter 4](#)), also included the need for a more conventional force in the final stage of a jihadist guerrilla insurgency. For Naji as for al-Muqrin, these forces would be used to control the regions of chaos produced by the guerrillas, from which forces of the exhausted central government had been withdrawn. These areas of chaos or savagery would fall under the control of jihadist forces. The areas controlled in this way are analogous to the secure bases in Giap’s Vietnam or Mao’s China, and they are probably what al-Zawahiri had in mind in his letter to al-Zarqawi in Iraq. So, al-Muqrin is in every sense in the mainstream of guerrilla and jihadist strategic thought in the context of his rollout of lessons dealing with terrorist techniques, tactics, and procedures. His manual prepared for the “jihad” in Saudi Arabia reflected al-Qaeda’s strategic thinking, which has outlived its author.

Al-Muqrin gives a detailed explanation of his version of the three-phase strategy espoused by Mao and General Giap in slightly different terms than other al-

Qaeda strategists, but the meaning is the same. His phases of guerrilla war are:

1. Attrition (Strategic Defense)
2. Relative Strategic Equilibrium (policy of 1,000 cuts)
3. Military Decision (final attack)⁹⁸

Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin's three phases resemble those of General Vo Nguyen Giap more than those of the other strategists we have been citing. The differences are not vast, but they raise some questions. Al-Qaeda had chosen to vest political and military command roles in one person, Osama Bin Laden. Al-Qaeda's structure had always allowed for advisory councils in all areas of concern, so there has always been a person in charge of the military council, but only the leader had command authority. The commander (emir) in a regional affiliate plays the same lead role. At his core, Al-Muqrin was in reality a military leader, like General Giap. His three phases resemble General Giap's phases more than Mao's. The phases articulated by Giap were:

1. Contention
2. Equilibrium
3. General counteroffensive⁹⁹

We should not make too much of these phases except for what they can tell us about the underlying strategy. For example, is it an accident that al-Muqrin has as his third phase the decisive end of the military struggle and not the establishment of an Islamic state in accord with al-Qaeda's ideology? Al-Muqrin clearly intended to establish an Islamic emirate, but he was too busy with the military struggle to think much about the political end except in general terms. Like Giap, he looked at the end of the guerrilla war to be the end of the military struggle, the defeat of the enemy forces. By all accounts, this neglect of the political struggle, or perhaps simply its failure, is what defeated AQAP as much as the powerful

security and intelligence forces of the Saudi state. Nevertheless, in his description of the phases, al-Muqrin repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the political and propaganda efforts, but unlike the precision of his military prescriptions, the details of the political program are rather thin.

Phase 1 of Guerrilla War: Attrition

Al-Muqrin points out that the first phase, from the jihadist perspective, is what we have been referring to as classic jihad: “defense of Islam, Muslims, holy places, and honor.” The author provides an explanation of each phase from the perspective of the central government and from the perspective of the jihadist guerrillas. In the first phase, according to the author, the government will deride the jihadists and present them as criminals and failures in life. Al-Muqrin claims that anyone in the region can see that governments use all the instruments of state propaganda to destroy the reputation of the jihadists. In Saudi Arabia, he asserts that the Saudi state used the leaders of the Islamic opposition, such as the members of the Sahwah movement, who had been speaking in opposition to the Saudi government, to attack the jihadists instead. The purpose of these attacks, according to al-Muqrin, was to isolate al-Qaeda from the people and discourage them from supporting the jihad.¹⁰⁰ The author points out that the Saudi government was using the Sahwah leaders Safar al-Hawali and Muhsin Al-Awaji to make secret offers of potential amnesty to the jihadists if they were to put down their arms.¹⁰¹ One of the rules of jihadist strategy, however, is to engage in no negotiations in phase one.

According to al-Muqrin, the first phase of guerrilla war, from the perspective of the opponents of the jihadists, involves intense security operations in parallel with their information campaign. It is characteristic of the “enemy” to try to engage jihadists in open battles where the superior power of the government can be brought to bear on the jihadist insurgents to destroy them regardless of the losses suffered by government forces.

Meanwhile, the jihadists distribute their forces and engage in attacks in widely dispersed areas to force the enemy likewise to distribute its forces to meet the challenge. If successful, this allows jihadists to attack weak points where they can demonstrate that they can defeat the enemy but where the enemy cannot find the jihadists to destroy them—this is the war of the flea.

In this phase, hit-and-run tactics accumulate propaganda value to discredit the government and attract young men to join the jihadist forces. Contrary to what one would expect to find in phase one of a regional insurgency, al-Muqrin claims that it may be necessary to carry out high-value operations in the first phase of jihad for high propaganda impact.¹⁰² High-value, or “quality,” attacks, in al-Qaeda’s parlance, means attacks like those on the USS *Cole* or a major embassy or consulate. The apex of such operations was 9/11.

Al-Muqrin gives three examples of jihadist operations with high propaganda impact. He quotes the former attorney general of the United States, John Ashcroft, claiming that media coverage of jihadist operations inadvertently helped al-Qaeda, and Turki al-Faisal, the former head of Saudi Intelligence and ambassador to the United States asserting that Bin Laden had opened up a historic rift between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Al-Muqrin also claims that special “operations” such as the attack on the USS *Cole*, the bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi, and the attacks of September 11 benefit al-Qaeda by raising the morale of jihadist youth and mobilizing the Muslim community. The author’s examples do not seem to match the phase he is describing; they are from al-Qaeda Central’s global war on the United States, when Bin Laden directed attacks against American targets in the United States, in Africa, and in one of Yemen’s harbors. In this phase of a regional insurgency, one would expect al-Muqrin to be describing attacks on isolated “enemy” targets, attacks designed to make the government overreact, as the dog does with the flea. Such attacks actually did take place in

Saudi Arabia, but they did not have the anticipated effect.

The recommendation to carry out attacks on high-value targets instead of hit-and-run attacks against small defined targets was a strategic mistake because terrorist attacks of the magnitude that would demand everyone's attention in Saudi Arabia were bound to backfire. Even large attacks not considered to reach the level of "high-value attacks" were dangerous. Because they were carried out in the cities of Saudi Arabia, they caused casualties to ordinary Saudi citizens. For example, on November 8, 2003, two al-Qaeda suicide bombers drove a van filled with explosives into the Muhayya residential area of Riyadh.¹⁰³ The attack was intended to be a great propaganda coup, but it turned out to be a propaganda disaster from which the al-Qaeda jihadists never recovered. The attack was in commemoration of the iconic seventh-century battle of Badr.¹⁰⁴ In addition to its timing relative to Badr's anniversary in the month of Ramadan, the explosive-filled van was designated 313, the number of Muslims believed to have participated in the original battle.

When the van exploded, it killed seventeen people and wounded over 120, most of whom were Arab Muslims, including children. It is not clear what the leadership of AQAP intended to accomplish, but they must have believed that they were attacking a large gathering of foreigners. The targeting was clearly a mistake, and the jihadist propaganda machine could not overcome it by denying early reports of the large number of Saudi casualties.¹⁰⁵ It was an example of losing the people's support before you have gained it. Such attacks were disastrous to al-Qaeda's objectives because the victims were often the very people whose support the jihadists desperately needed. Earlier bombings in May 2003 in Riyadh, moreover, sparked a massive government crackdown that was devastating to al-Qaeda's local leadership. For example, Saudi forces killed Yusuf al-Uyayri in a firefight on May 31, 2003,

thereby removing al-Qaeda's most effective leader at the very beginning of its campaign. It is ironic that in the last chapter of his manual al-Muqrin quotes al-Uyayri about the danger of urban operations: "The dangers surrounding the mujahid in cities are many times more than those in mountains or jungles."¹⁰⁶

According to al-Qaeda's doctrine, spectacular attacks should have been delayed until the later phases of the insurgency, when the guerrilla forces, having been successful with hit-and-run attacks, would be trying to destroy the will of the exhausted government. Also according to doctrine, at later phases al-Qaeda would also have more conventional forces that would have a greater chance of defeating government forces or at least fighting them to a stalemate. Carrying out such operations in the first phase thus broke al-Muqrin's cautionary rule against rushing from phase to phase. It mobilized the full power of the Saudi Arabian government's forces before AQAP was strong enough to engage them. More importantly, carrying out spectacular terrorist attacks in densely populated areas is more likely to repulse Muslim populations than to attract them to al-Qaeda, which was a lesson learned previously in Algeria and Egypt but was about to be learned again in Saudi Arabia. It was also the key lesson Bin Laden was to brood about in his last days in Abbottabad.

It is difficult to be sure why al-Qaeda would not have followed their own strategy, something that al-Muqrin understood from long experience and study. Perhaps the jihad was following a path determined by its own premature launch. The leadership of al-Qaeda must have felt desperate to launch the jihad because the alternative was to risk becoming irrelevant, to see themselves fail after the spectacular notoriety they had gained as a result of the 9/11 attacks. So they did not spend years preparing the population for the jihad. They knew enough to understand that their general propaganda over the previous years would not be sufficient to influence the Saudi populace to support

them. They needed to find resonant local issues and work on those issues over a relatively long period of time. Thomas Hegghammer, in his history of the jihad in Saudi Arabia, provides evidence that the leadership in AQAP kept the lower ranks of the jihad in the dark about their “revolutionary agenda,” that is, their intention to overthrow the Saudi government. They launched the jihad, therefore, solely on the basis of fighting foreigners on Saudi soil, especially Americans. This resulted in some of their recruits joining for pan-Islamic or classical jihad purposes, even though the leadership’s intentions were to overthrow the regime.

When the invasion of Iraq siphoned off money and manpower, AQAP did not grow according to plan, lacking both funding and men. Meanwhile, the Saudi government, warned and then assisted by the Americans, awakened to the real threat. The Saudi security forces began to have considerable success, most notably by killing a number of leaders, including the most talented leader in Saudi Arabia, Yusuf al-Uyayri. Al-Muqrin and other leaders must have felt the need to demonstrate that they were a powerful force. To accomplish this they produced operations that would appear to suggest a larger, more powerful force than actually existed. These very attacks, however, turned the unprepared public against them.

Losing the sympathy of local people initiated a death spiral for al-Qaeda in high population centers. People shocked by bomb attacks that kill children or even local Muslim policemen are people who inform on al-Qaeda members in their neighborhoods. Even killing foreigners, whether they are tourists or highly skilled guest workers, has historically inflamed populations’ sense of outrage, especially when they think the local economy will be hurt or feel their honor will be tarnished in international opinion. Al-Muqrin was clearly aware of this danger, at least in theory. For example, in [chapter 5](#) of his manual he spells out the disadvantages of urban operations at

any phase of guerrilla warfare, let alone in the first phase.

Finally, al-Muqrin points out that in phase one the “enemy” will fight from fixed bases that are well known to all. Al-Qaeda’s jihadists, on the other hand, are mobile and capable of moving from place to place. They are lightly armed and leave little or no footprint. In an urban setting, this means moving from safe house to safe house; in a rural setting, it means moving from temporary camp to temporary camp.

Phase 2 of Guerrilla War: Relative Strategic Equilibrium

After jihadists have gained experience, proved they can survive the attacks of the central government, gained the support of a large portion of the population, and recruited more young men to their cause, they spontaneously enter the next phase of their guerrilla war. At the beginning of this phase, according to al-Muqrin, the “enemy” has concluded that it cannot destroy the jihadist forces and turns to a political solution through negotiation. At this point, however, al-Muqrin asserts that a problem will develop with the military establishment. The military will not be interested in a negotiated solution. They will still want to defeat the jihadists. This could cause the military to attempt a coup to take the political reins of state. Alternately, the military could pressure the rulers to seek help from foreign forces. Al-Muqrin predicts the messages will include warnings to the people of other countries that their governments should not involve them in wars.

The jihadists, recognizing the weakness of the government, will intensify their political campaign with the objective of establishing a new caliphate. At this point, the jihadists will occupy liberated zones within the country in which jihadist administrative cadres act as the shadow government. The jihadists also must amplify their propaganda campaign and initiate or increase diplomatic contacts with other countries. The concept of

liberated zones is purely theoretical in the Saudi Arabian context. Where it worked in China, Vietnam, and even Afghanistan, the guerrilla forces could be expected to set up hospitals, schools, courts, and information agencies. These areas also become firmly established military bases to support operations in adjacent areas. Conventional forces will begin to appear in the liberated areas, which can be used to defend these areas and conduct military campaigns in the final phase of the jihad. In the 2003 jihad in Saudi Arabia, al-Qaeda was not able to advance to this phase. The Saudi government never faltered before forcing al-Qaeda to retreat—after destroying most of its forces.

Phase 3: Military Decision

The third phase of regional jihad is marked by the final attack and the annihilation of the enemy. This “final attack” is not a single event but rather an accumulation of events, primarily in the major cities. The collapse of the central government will occur despite massive outside help, as happened in Vietnam. Al-Muqrin paints a picture of the chaos of a collapsing regime with military forces breaking apart, some of them verging toward mutiny and others defecting to the jihad with al-Qaeda at its head. The jihadists must be ready to take advantage of defectors especially from the government’s administrative cadres, always a weak spot with al-Qaeda, which struggles to recruit men with administrative experience and talent. At the same time, the jihadists must be vigilant for spies and other enemy agents. So far, much of what al-Muqrin has to report concerning the phases of guerrilla warfare lines up with Abu Bakr Naji’s more complete description, as we shall see. It is significant that al-Muqrin claims that jihadists in this third, decisive phase should increase contacts with jihadists in other countries. Once they have consolidated their governance of the Arabian Peninsula, for example, they can begin to help jihadists in other countries liberate themselves from the “oppression of the Jews and Christians.” Over time, they will revive preemptive jihad

(*jihad al-talab*) in other countries. In characterizing this new jihad, al-Muqrin uses the famous phrase of Abd al-Salem Faraj, "*al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah*" (the Hidden Obligation), the religious duty to engage in jihad. It would seem that al-Muqrin, al-Qaeda's chosen leader in Saudi Arabia, is endorsing a revolutionary course far beyond the Arabian Peninsula.

Militarily, this phase sees in theory the almost total withdrawal of government troops from the countryside and remote areas. The government cannot muster ground forces against jihadist bases in remote areas but will attack them from the air using planes or missiles. The government will strive to retain control over the lines of communications between major cities, which have now become armed camps, essentially fixed fortress bases for what is left of the government troops. Meanwhile, the jihadists will muster their newly minted conventional forces to attack vulnerable cities to increase the central government's despair and push for a total collapse. At the same time, the jihadists must retain strong guerrilla forces and maintain their bases in mountainous or remote areas.

Al-Muqrin's end state is ominous. In the aftermath of victory, the jihadists will set up shari'ah courts to try apostates. It is not difficult to imagine this devolving into a reign of terror, as the newly established emirate prepares to export its version of jihad regionwide. In Saudi Arabia, this would likely also mean a radical reduction in the export of petroleum, which would have the intended dire consequences on the world economy. This vision seems highly improbable when viewed from the outside. The jihad in Saudi Arabia never progressed past the first phase. The result of the effort was the killing of almost all of the promising leaders of the al-Qaeda organization. Yet this view was not the view from inside al-Qaeda. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri decided to reconstitute AQAP using entirely new leadership but with the same doctrine and strategy. Al-Muqrin's military doctrine and his brief description of strategy lead directly

to Abu Bakr Naji, whose book on strategy is still the most accurate description of al-Qaeda's global strategy at the time of this writing. It has been endorsed by the leadership now in Yemen, who seem to be trying to avoid some of the mistakes of the jihad inside Saudi Arabia.¹⁰⁷ Before we turn to an examination of Abu Bakr Naji's thought, however, we need to ask: what is al-Muqrin's legacy beyond the obvious failures inside Saudi Arabia?

AL-MUQRIN'S LEGACY: PROFESSIONALISM AMONG AL-QAEDA GUERRILLAS

Beyond a description of al-Qaeda's strategy as it applies in a regional insurgency or "open front," al-Muqrin's true legacy is a concise manual containing the tricks of the trade for guerrillas. His descriptions of tradecraft are much more practical than his overarching vision of insurgency. His manual contains detailed instructions for mountain and urban guerrilla organization, tactics, and weaponry. The author has obviously absorbed and digested the approaches of successful guerrilla leaders before him. His descriptions are concise, clear, and detailed. He informs his readers about everything they need to have to carry out a jihad. Such materials already existed online in the vast encyclopedia of jihad and guerrilla warfare, but al-Muqrin's instructions are tailored to the Arabian Peninsula and collected in a compact package that can be quickly read and easily memorized.

His second chapter lays out the "essential prerequisites for standing up a successful guerrilla war." It is hard not to see that many of these conditions simply did not exist in Saudi Arabia. In the broadest terms, these prerequisites were the presence of a capable and respected guerrilla leadership cadre and suitable conditions on the ground, a favorable response from the people, the means of carrying out operations by force (preparations and materiel), and knowledge of the art of conventional and unconventional war. There is no doubt that the leadership cadre in Saudi Arabia was experienced, battle hardened, and dedicated to al-

Qaeda's ideology. By "suitable conditions" the author means that the situation in the country make the people ready for revolution. The example al-Muqrin gives is Algeria, when a military coup in 1992 prevented an Islamist party, the Islamic Salvation Front, from taking power as a result of popular national elections. Similar conditions did not exist in Saudi Arabia in 2003 despite al-Qaeda's propaganda.

Al-Muqrin defines a favorable popular response as both passive and active. A passive response in this context means that the people will tolerate jihadists in their midst and even provide small tokens of support: food, funding, other material assistance. And, more importantly, they will not inform on jihadists. These essential conditions were lacking in Saudi Arabia. An active response means that people are willing to bear arms and provide significant material support. As we have explained, after bombs began exploding in neighborhoods, both types of popular support disappeared, if indeed they had ever existed. From this chapter, it is clear that al-Muqrin understood the problem of popular support all too well. He interjects what he calls an "important observation": jihadists should not target what al-Muqrin calls "the agents of the Crusaders." The jihadist movement should target "Jews and Crusaders" only.¹⁰⁸ These agents of the Crusaders were the government forces, such as the police. During the insurgency, al-Muqrin himself was to disregard this "important observation" by attacking police stations, which caused the movement to suffer further in popular regard because the men who died were ordinary Saudi citizens and Muslims doing their duty. Al-Muqrin was not able to follow his own advice in 2003 and 2004 in Saudi Arabia. Part of his legacy, however, appears to be the tactics pursued in Yemen by the consolidated AQAP.

In the following chapters of his manual, al-Muqrin informs his readers how to arm and equip guerrillas, right down to the contents of their ammunition pouches and the brand of their GPS systems. He gives instructions on

using dead drops and how to perform surveillance on targets for kidnapping and assassination. He describes motorcades and advises on the best tactics to attack them. In clear prose, he describes tactics best suited to the mountains and the cities. His tactics are not exotic or original, but they are professionally described and feasible.

Perhaps the most important lesson that al-Muqrin has bequeathed to those who were to follow him is what he calls the “core of the subject”: how to plan for operations. In this section, al-Muqrin gives a detailed explanation of seven phases of planning:

1. Defining the target with precision
2. Gathering sufficient information on the target
3. Defining the method of killing, the best timing for executing the mission, etc.
4. Creation of a plan by the leadership and briefing it to the members
5. Rehearsal of the execution of the plan
6. Execution of the mission
7. Escape

The author emphasizes a process that is neither impetuous nor a drawn-out affair. He intends his men to escape. At the same time, he does not want them to make escape more important than the mission. Following a discussion of the seven phases, the author provides several planning exercises, for which he provides criticism. It is a cookbook for mayhem, with lessons that are universally applicable. The manual is drafted in a way to avoid giving away any operational details that could have compromised ongoing terrorist missions. The manual itself is the practical underpinning to the improved strategic mission that we are about to examine in the work of Abu Bakr Naji.

The legacy of al-Muqrin (when added to that of Abu Bakr Naji, discussed in the next chapter) is best seen in

AQAP as it was reconstituted in 2009. Al-Qaeda still uses extracts from his books to inform its new recruits about basic military skills. The Arabian Peninsula as a whole is the immediate target, with attacks on Saudi Arabia attempted from Yemen. The petroleum industry is still the target and harming the American economy still the priority. Al-Qaeda's franchise in Yemen is in the culmination of the strategic vision left by Osama Bin Laden, a vision that has faltered. The United States is still the target of a much-weakened al-Qaeda global network that nevertheless is still dangerous. By preserving the legacy of al-Qaeda's strategy and military doctrine, the future leaders of jihad will hope to revive a vision that has been badly damaged but not yet destroyed. The ideology, never embraced by many people, is dangerous as long as it is cherished by a few.

Four

An Action Plan for Savagery

Guerrilla warfare could not last long or grow without base areas.

—Mao Tse-tung, *The Art of War*

WHY IS *THE ADMINISTRATION OF SAVAGERY* IMPORTANT?

In 2004, when the jihad in Saudi Arabia had already turned decisively in the government's favor, Abu Bakr Naji, a man who was close to al-Qaeda's leadership, finished the definitive account of al-Qaeda's strategy for winning a jihadist insurgency.¹ At this time, we know neither when he was born nor his nationality. William McCants reported on the Jihadica website in April 2008 that a major jihadist insider claimed that Naji was dead, although the date of his death was not given.²

The title of Naji's book is *Idarah al-Tawahhush* (*The Administration of Savagery*), with the subtitle *Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (*The Most Dangerous Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass*). It was posted on a jihadist online forum in 2005 and received with great interest. In the first six months of 2008, Saudi authorities arrested some seven hundred suspected al-Qaeda terrorists inside their borders. Then, on June 25, 2008, Saudi officials announced that many of those arrested had Naji's book in their possession and concluded that these men were trying to implement Naji's blueprint in a violent terrorist campaign inside Saudi Arabia.³ As we shall see, evidence from the book supports the Saudis' conclusion because Naji's book, like al-Muqrin's manual, has been used by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as a training tool for jihad

within its clandestine cells both in Saudi Arabia and openly in Yemen.

One compelling reason to study Naji's *Administration of Savagery* is that it is a distillation of jihadist strategic thinking on insurgency over the previous decade. Naji's references (direct and indirect) to other strategists and ideologues in al-Qaeda's line include Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, and Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. Like their concepts of jihad, Naji's revolutionary guerrilla war is marked by three distinct stages and shows the influence of Robert Taber's *The War of the Flea*. Whereas al-Qurashi wrote on theoretical and topical issues to convince his audience that al-Qaeda could defeat the United States, Naji focused on helping the reader understand how al-Qaeda could defeat the United States and its allies by using a global strategy based on regional jihad.

AQAP after its reemergence in Yemen in 2009 continued to use *The Administration of Savagery* as its strategic guide to jihad.⁴ This is especially important for understanding the relationship between AQAP's continuing threat to Saudi Arabia and its petroleum industry and the homegrown terrorist threat inside the United States and Europe. Naji emphasizes the importance of the media and al-Qaeda's political program to jihad. AQAP has used Naji's book as a recruiting tool and has boasted that it is using Naji's strategy as its guide to defeating the United States.⁵ *The Administration of Savagery* thus provides the continuing strategic adjunct to al-Muqrin's description of al-Qaeda's military doctrine. Naji takes al-Muqrin's doctrine as a given and expands on the strategic political-military context of that doctrine.

Naji intended the scope of *The Administration of Savagery* to extend beyond al-Qaeda's jihad in Saudi Arabia or even the Arabian Peninsula as the top leadership's strategic guide to insurgency. The formation of AQAP was a personal project of Osama Bin Laden. After his death, it remains a priority in al-Qaeda's global

strategy even though AQAP has been forced to retreat to Yemen after its devastation in Saudi Arabia.⁶ The fact that Abu Bakr Naji wrote a number of substantial articles for the political publication of the al-Qaeda jihad in Saudi Arabia, *Sawt al-Jihad*, in which only major al-Qaeda figures published, is an indication that he was close to Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri and represents their views.⁷ The author explains how his strategy should be applied to other Arab countries, but he also intends the strategy to apply to non-Arab Pakistan and Nigeria, both of which are cited as top priorities. Furthermore, he shows broad knowledge of historical jihadist operations specifically in Egypt and Algeria that tend to reflect the thinking of Ayman al-Zawahiri. He makes frequent references to other jihadists and refers his readers to specific studies performed by another renowned strategist of jihad, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.⁸ The breadth of Naji's knowledge and his references to other jihadists' published works and notebooks support his claim of personal access to knowledgeable practitioners of jihad within al-Qaeda's circle.

NAJI'S CONCEPT OF UNIVERSAL LAWS

Naji shows no evidence of a religious education. On occasion, he cites the need for someone else with the appropriate background to provide a detailed analysis based on the shari'ah for this or that aspect of his work, such as the rules that should govern the pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*).⁹ He does show respect for basic tenets of Salafism but does not write recruitment tracts or sermons. He is an insider, like al-Muqrin, writing for insiders. As such, he is a rationalist, like al-Qurashi, al-Muqrin, or Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who espouses what he calls "pure human reason" or "universal laws" (*sunan kawniyyah*). By pure human reason, Naji means a reasoning process that does not depend on the Qur'an or the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. While he would never admit it, Naji's thinking is quite secular inside its Salafist cloak.

Because Naji's "universal laws" are at the very core of al-Qaeda's thinking about jihad and are not based on shari'ah, they represent an opportunity for the West to engage in the war of ideas. I have referred to such engagement as the deep battle. It attacks ideology, which cannot be defeated by kinetic operations used in the close battle. The laws of politics and war are not Islamic, according to Naji. Universal laws do have a place in Islamic teaching and are those observable phenomena that are predictable: for example, the sun appears to rise in the east and set in the west.¹⁰ Naji, however, extends universal laws to include the time-tested military principles of war and even to what he calls the "political game."

Some of the laws of war and politics in al-Qaeda's thinking, as we have seen, are derived from Mao Tse-tung and other communist strategists as well as from Europeans and Americans. Al-Qaeda uses its concept of *sunan kawniyyah* as a loophole to justify whatever tactics it needs to pursue its revolutionary goals. In practice, this means that al-Qaeda claims to be the ultimate arbiter of morality in Islam even without a recognized argument from Islamic law, a position, which if stated clearly in the context of terrorist attacks, would be unacceptable to virtually all other Salafist groups. Nevertheless, when the current AQAP discusses its strategy and cites Naji's book as its guide, the organization uses its understanding of universal laws as a reason for young men to join al-Qaeda; following universal laws and practical reason is considered a bragging point. Attacking the morality of the terrorist tactics and the validity of these universal laws is in no way attacking Islam; rather, it amounts to attacking old Cold War communist strategies in which the ends justify the means.

Sunan kawniyyah is the rational underpinning of al-Qaeda's enterprise and also one of its greatest ideological weaknesses. Despite all the references to Qur'an and hadith in al-Qaeda's literature and its claim

to Salafist orientation, Naji and al-Qaeda base their strategy on laws of human reason that are not specifically Islamic. This is a significant point because violent jihad is at the heart of al-Qaeda's ideology, but they justify its strategy using arguments devised by human reasoning. In the fourth article attached to the *Administration of Savagery* ("Universal Laws for Both Good People and Others"), Naji shows something like frustration with those who want to justify decisions concerning jihad according to religious reasoning.¹¹

Planning war is a function of practical reason, not religious law. According to Naji, it is not only wrong to argue about these matters based on hadith; it can be dangerous. Establishing a shari'ah state, according to Naji, is based on the same universal laws as establishing any other type of state. The difference is in the end product: the shari'ah state is based on Islamic law and is righteous; any other type of state is based on some form of falsehood and can never be righteous, according to Naji and al-Qaeda. Naji warns that al-Qaeda and other jihadists rely on books of guerrilla warfare that are a mixture of what he thinks of as universal laws and false doctrine. From another perspective, Naji blames the Muslim Brotherhood as a group that confuses shari'ah laws with universal laws of human reason. They are especially dangerous because people think they are speaking as good Muslims, although they are simply confused. He is concerned about Muslims who believe that a true Islamic state can be achieved without violence, claiming that it is a universal law that obtaining power requires violence. Naji is frustrated because al-Qaeda's leadership is ill suited to talk to ordinary Muslims as religious scholars, and his arguments are not likely to be widely understood. Naji's real problem in the deep battle is that he has no way to prove what a universal law is and what it is not. At the end of his article, he inserts a strong statement that could be interpreted as saying something that is not Salafist in spirit: universal laws have their proper place, and so do laws based on the Qur'an and hadith. Naji seems to

sweep both under one umbrella called “divine laws.” In Naji’s words:

In closing, we emphasize that the world is an abode of laws that may not be cast aside nor opposed. They grind down anyone who stands in their way, plays with them, or disregards them under the pretext of busying himself with the righteousness of his heart, or the appointed times of meditation and worship. Divine laws do not defer to anyone or delay for any man whoever he may be.¹²

Certainly, the concept of “universal laws” has a place in Salafist dogma, but it is hard to see how any Salafist scholar not associated with al-Qaeda could justify Naji’s bald statement using the usual recognized tools of religious discourse.¹³ Instead, these “laws” belong as much to the West’s domain as to al-Qaeda and can thus be subject to rational argument in the war of ideas. Moreover, everyone has the right to challenge al-Qaeda’s assertions in the court of reason and experience without reference to Islam at all. Of course, there are many examples in which a religious movement has used a secular strategy to achieve a religious purpose. Al-Qaeda, however, has a secular strategy at the heart of its ideology that inevitably leads to results that are abhorrent to ordinary Islamic ethics and morality—an outcome of which the world has witnessed many examples and a result that was feared by Osama Bin Laden in his last days.

OVERVIEW OF *THE ADMINISTRATION OF SAVAGERY*

The Administration of Savagery contains 113 pages of Arabic text comprising the treatise from which the book takes its name and the seven articles Naji wrote for the *Sawt al-Jihad (Voice of Jihad)* magazine. The treatise itself is divided into an introduction, a preface on “the system that has governed the world since the Sykes-Picot era,” and five major sections, each of which is

characterized as a topic of research (*mabhath*). These major sections are:

First Topic: the definition of the administration of savagery and its historical precedents

Second Topic: the path to establishing [an Islamic state]

Third Topic: the most important rules and policies to facilitate the pursuit of an action plan to achieve the goals of the stage of “the power of harassment and exhaustion” in a general sense and the goals of the stage of “the administration of savagery” in a specific sense (with Allah’s permission!)

Fourth Topic: the most important problems and obstacles that will face us and the ways to deal with them

Fifth Topic and Conclusion: “do other solutions exist that are easier than this one?”

Naji’s study is not intended to persuade Muslims to join the caravan of jihad.¹⁴ There is very little in the way of justifying his positions using the Holy Qur’an or the traditions of the Prophet. He appears to assume that his readers are already convinced of the righteousness of “Salafist jihadism” but need to understand that al-Qaeda’s approach to jihad is based on solid strategy and lessons learned. He also emphasizes the need for coordination and recognition of the role of al-Qaeda’s senior leadership. On the other hand, Naji makes no case for following a command-and-control structure that we would expect in a state’s military planning. The lack of such a centralized structure may suggest that al-Qaeda has no grand strategy, but such a conclusion ignores al-Qaeda’s understanding of guerrilla war. Centralization of policy and decentralization of regional operations is part of al-Qaeda’s revolutionary doctrine, as reflected in al-Qurashi’s work on fourth-generation warfare and as explained in greater detail in the works of

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri. Decentralization includes a grand strategy that is consultative in nature, involving guidance rather than organizational mandates and hierarchical organization. Such a strategy is exactly what Naji intends to describe.

Early in his book, Naji characterizes his work for his reader, whom he sometimes refers to as a student (*daris*):

This study entitled “The Administration of Savagery, the Most Dangerous Stage Through Which the Ummah Will Pass” consists of a broad outline and is not concerned with details. Instead, details are left to two groups: those specializing in the arts [this] study discusses and the actual leaders in the regions of the administration of savagery. Whenever details are provided in the study, they are provided only because of their significance or as examples to sharpen the mind.¹⁵

The “regions of the administration of savagery” are the same as what al-Muqrin refers to as “liberated regions.” Naji, unlike al-Muqrin, will describe how jihadist cadres should administer those regions. Naji leaves the details of operations to leaders like al-Muqrin. Out of a sense of operational security, Naji, the seasoned conspirator, generally avoids referring to active al-Qaeda leaders by name.

Like all al-Qaeda strategists, Abu Bakr Naji is very careful about his writing. He recommends that a reader work through the book slowly. He admits that he is repetitive but claims that this repetition is a tool to get his major points across from different perspectives. Careful writing that includes seeking input and vetting drafts with colleagues is characteristic of major al-Qaeda authors. It is likely that Naji vetted his book within al-Qaeda's inner circle, as did al-Zawahiri in producing his attack on Pakistan's constitution, *Al-Subh wa al-Qindil* (*The Morning and the Lamp*). Zawahiri wrote his monograph

approximately a year before it appeared on the Internet and vetted it with people he trusted before putting it out in public.¹⁶ Similarly, Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri whenever possible vetted his works before publishing them to a wider audience. Regardless of what one might think of the content of their writings, therefore, one must acknowledge that al-Qaeda authors have a great respect for the written word and require us to pay careful attention to the terminology and references contained in their books and articles.¹⁷

Introduction: The Primacy of Al-Qaeda Among Islamist Movements

Naji begins his treatise with a description of the context in which Salafist jihadists operate. He critiques those Islamist groups that have a written program or method (*manhaj*) that lends itself to rational description. Sayyid Qutb after he had joined the Muslim Brotherhood distinguished his organization from ordinary Muslims by claiming his organization had a *manhaj* to create a true Islamic order, whereas ordinary Muslims did not.¹⁸ Likewise, Naji places the “current of jihadist Salafism” at the pinnacle of Islamist groups because it “established a comprehensive program and plan [based on] shari‘ah and universal laws.”

Naji dismisses the group al-Tabligh wa al-Da‘wah (Proselytizing and Preaching), a pietistic movement prominent in Pakistan. Next on his list is Sufism, a mystical approach to Islam that is usually a target for criticism within Salafist circles. Sufism can be quietist or violent depending on the circumstances and the region where active Sufis live. Finally, Naji rules out of consideration any state Salafism, including the state-sponsored religious authorities of Saudi Arabia. He then lists the five Islamist currents with written programs:

1. Salafist jihadism
2. Sahwah Salafism (Saudi Arabia)
3. The Muslim Brotherhood

4. The Brotherhood of Turabi (the Sudanese leader)
5. Popular jihad (Hamas, the Moro Liberation Front, and the like)

Naji, like Ayman al-Zawahiri, has contempt for the Muslim Brotherhood because he considers them hypocrites who claim to be following a strict program but do not practice what they preach. Furthermore, the Brotherhood has compromised with despots over the years as a way to survive fierce attacks, and they have been willing to participate in democracy, which al-Qaeda considers incompatible with Islam. Similarly, Naji considers Sudan to have drifted away from the Salafist jihadist path. No doubt Osama Bin Laden's bad experience in Sudan influenced Naji's negative views.¹⁹

The Sahwah movement in Saudi Arabia is a mostly loyal opposition movement. Its two most famous proponents, Salman al-Awdah and Safar al-Hawali, went too far, however, and were jailed from 1994 until 1999 by the Saudi authorities.²⁰ When they were released, they steered away from confrontational politics against the Saudi authorities and focused on religious issues, a pragmatic approach similar to that of the modern Muslim Brotherhood. Naji criticizes the Sahwah for betraying its principles after the 9/11 attacks, which its leaders condemned. Unlike al-Qaeda, the Sahwah movement in Saudi Arabia has enjoyed a high degree of credibility with the majority Sunni population.

Al-Qaeda persistently opposes nationalist movements. Hamas is focused on Israel, not on global jihad, and is therefore primarily a nationalist movement, albeit with an Islamist political program. In light of the persistent emphasis Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have given over the years to the goal of destroying Israel and the constant reference to the plight of the Palestinians, one might expect al-Qaeda to pay at least lip service to Hamas. The Hamas model, however, like that of the Muslim Brotherhood, competes with al-

Qaeda for the allegiance of Arab youth and the calculations of those who fund Islamist groups. Naji condemns Hamas along with similar nationalist jihadist groups like the Moro Liberation Front.

At the end of his introduction, Naji gives the reader a clue about his intentions, indicating that he will be discussing the plan or grand strategy embedded in the jihadist program and described by their literature. He quotes from an unidentified article he had written previously:

I indicated that I was on the path to completing a study in which I would solve all the complications of the previous events; and I would explain in it the broad outline of the project (*mashru'*) of the people of monotheism and jihad (*al-tawhid wa al-jihad*) [that is] scattered throughout their publications and literature over a long time. All who have come in contact with them [i.e., their publications and literature] are aware of it [the project].²¹

Naji admits the plan that he is about to explain might not be successful in the short run. If it is successful, he asserts, it will be a “bridge to the Islamic state that has been awaited since the fall of the Caliphate.” If the enterprise fails, “it will lead to an increase in savagery.” Naji assures his reader that this savagery or chaos is not the worst thing that could happen. The worst thing is to fall under infidel rule. Whether or not he personally experienced the devastating counterattack on al-Qaeda terrorists by Saudi security forces, he was aware of the deaths of al-Muqrin, al-Uyayri, and others. The future is not at all certain. The most important thing is to preserve the strategy and adjust the plan to live within the chaos and fight another day. Naji is quick to add that there is a difference between the violence of the “apostate” Muslim leaders and the jihadist Salafists because the jihadists kill people who are following Satan.

Naji's Preface: The System Governing the World Since Sykes-Picot

For Arab intellectuals like Ayman al-Zawahiri who found their way into the orbit of al-Qaeda, the Sykes-Picot agreement marks the beginning of modern history.²² This brief political document, negotiated and concluded in secret in May 1916 between Sir Mark Sykes of Great Britain and Georges Picot of France, contradicted assurances given by the British to Husayn ibn Ali, the sharif (governor) of Mecca, at the time. The Arabs had every expectation that the British would honor promises of a wider political role in the region and of some sort of Arab homeland in Greater Syria as a reward for their revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Instead, the British found it more expedient to agree with France on how the Ottoman Empire in the central Middle East would be carved up into British and French spheres of influence and control. For al-Qaeda's strategists and historians to choose this point in history indicates an appeal to Arab nationalism rather than any pan-Islamic narrative. Naji could have chosen the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which cemented British support for Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, if he wanted to emphasize Israel's centrality to his strategy. Such a choice would have been consonant with al-Qaeda's often declared hostility toward Zionism and Israel. On the other hand, Naji could have chosen the end of the Turkish caliphate in 1924 if he had wanted to emphasize the religious, legal argument of the implacable hostility of secularism and democracy to Islam. Instead, using the Sykes-Picot agreement allows him to develop a narrative that usurps the appeal of pan-Arabism and at the same time emphasizes both the victimization of the Arabs by great Western powers and the artificiality of the current borders of the countries from the northern borders of Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean Sea. Ayman al-Zawahiri is blunt in his description of the Sykes-Picot agreement: "Sanctifying national unity is one of the rotten fruits of the Sykes-Picot agreement, which divided the Muslim Ummah into

various pieces of booty, in order to plunder the wealth left over from the Ottoman Empire.”²³

Naji does not need to explain Sykes-Picot to his audience. Instead, he begins his investigations with a statement of what he considers to be a universal law.

The contemplation of previous centuries until the middle of the twentieth century finds that when large states or empires fall (or even small states, Islamic or not): no [new] state was established that was comparable in power to the preceding state in the extent of its control over the lands and regions of the state that had collapsed. [Instead] the regions and sectors would undergo a change because of human nature and become subject to what is termed the *administration of savagery*.

When the Caliphate fell, this savagery occurred to some extent in some of the regions, however, the situation soon stabilized because of what the Sykes-Picot agreement had approved.²⁴

Naji goes on to say that governments were established by the agreement that were either military in nature or civilian governments dependent upon the military. Naji argues that soon these countries began to circle in the orbit of the two great superpowers that emerged after World War II. According to Naji’s analysis, these new states, composed mostly of Muslims, took on the values of one or the other of the superpowers. If one of these Muslim-majority states changed allegiance from one superpower to another, they simply changed values. The one constant is that the governments plundered the resources of the states and that their societies decayed. Naji’s argument is consonant with the crisis of values described by Sayyid Qutb, who argued that the world was ready for a new leader to provide values for the people, promoting justice, happiness, and most importantly freedom from subjection to other men, that is, the tyrants with their armies and security forces.

On occasion, the people of one or another of these states tried to escape from the foreign values imposed on them. Naji identifies two sources of power for such an escape: the people or the military. He holds out no hope for either. He claims the people's power is mostly diverted by mundane pursuits like sex or wealth. He did not imagine, for example, that the people of Egypt or Tunisia could rise up spontaneously against their leaders. The state-controlled media (in Naji's terms, "the deceptive media halo") provides distractions of all kinds. Naji also refers to traditional groups, like the Sufis or others within Muslim societies that support whatever government is in power, as either apostates or Muslims in name only. Ultimately Naji's arguments are based on the opinion that security forces will always protect the threatened regime and, by extension, the interests of the superpower upon which it depends.

The Illusion of Power

Naji's argument that his global jihad strategy is the best way to return Islam to its former glory depends on the United States conforming to the famous comment that America is a "paper tiger."²⁵ Osama Bin Laden believed from the beginning that when Americans bleed, they leave. Bin Laden also believed that if America leaves the Middle East and stops supporting local regimes, the "apostate" states would soon fall and that Islamic emirates would rapidly take their place. The final cataclysm involves the war of the united Islamic community against Israel. Bin Laden's intention in declaring war on America was to involve the United States in "bleeding wars."²⁶ While Bin Laden may have had a grander design of destroying the United States, as he believed jihadists destroyed the Soviet Union, victory for al-Qaeda is defined as forcing the United States to withdraw from the Middle East. We have seen that al-Qaeda in general believed that asymmetric warfare, the war of the flea against the dog, was the key to fighting the United States. We could also say that victory is asymmetric: al-Qaeda need only force the United States

to withdraw from the Middle East, while America needs to destroy al-Qaeda fully and discredit its ideology and strategy.²⁷

Naji's subtitle for the section on the illusion of power is "The Centrality of the Two Superpowers: Partly Almighty Military Power and Partly Deceptive Media Halo." Naji recognizes that the United States and the former Soviet Union possess overwhelming military power, but even more importantly they have a media advantage that magnifies all their other advantages. He sees that the United States is truly the master of media art. In describing the superpowers, he uses the term "pole" (*qutb*). In Arabic, the term can mean "tent pole." Ironically, it is also a medieval term used by Sufis and some shi'ah groups to designate the leader who is the charismatic center of the world. Naji uses the image of the two poles around which the world revolves to describe the international political reality of the Cold War.

Naji's narrative includes the mythic story about how Salafist jihad destroyed the Soviet Union and how Salafist jihad can now destroy the other pole. He notes that from the human perspective, Allah gives superpowers almighty, overwhelming military power to work their ways in the world. On the other hand, Naji points out: "In reality, however, after careful consideration by pure human reason—they [superpowers] are not able to impose their authority from the central country (America, for example, or Russia) on the lands of Egypt or Yemen, unless these countries submit to the superpowers purely of their own free will."²⁸

Naji points out that it is normal for people to look at the United States with a sense of awe. He states that people are correct to recognize that America possesses almighty, arrogant power and the ability to use local proxies to rule the "Islamic world." Yet these advantages are not sufficient to secure the superpowers' interests. Therefore both superpowers have resorted to what Naji refers to as a "deceptive media halo." This media halo that surrounds the United States is intended to convince

people that America is not coercive but at the same time encompasses the entire world and has the power of “the Creator” in its ability to extend its reach over “the whole earth and all of heaven.” Naji claims that the two superpowers actually believe their own disinformation campaigns. The curious thing is that people submit to both superpowers not out of fear alone but also out of “love.” Here Naji sees both superpowers as essentially equivalent because each wielded great power while also claiming to be the purveyor of “freedom, justice, equality, and other slogans.”

At this point, Naji introduces an argument fundamental to his strategy to defeat the United States: “Whenever a state succumbs—whatever the extent of its reach—to the illusion of deceptive power and conducts itself on this basis, at this point its [own] downfall begins. Just as the American [*sic*] author, Paul Kennedy, says: ‘if America expands its employment of military power and extends strategically more than necessary, this will lead to its downfall.’”²⁹ It has become an article of faith for jihadists that the mujahedeen caused the Soviet Union to collapse by defeating them in Afghanistan. The story is generally told without any reference to American assistance, let alone help from Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. Naji uses the example of the Soviet collapse to demonstrate the validity of Paul Kennedy’s observation about imperial overreach. Naji is mostly interested in how to exploit this tendency to overextend, and he sees the self-delusion of the superpowers as the point of entry for the jihadist spear. He has identified the superpowers’ comparative advantages of superior weapons, technology, combatants, and media to control the narrative and emphasize and exaggerate the military power they possess.

Superpowers at the center of their spheres of influence also possess social cohesion, in which their institutions and laws work together for common goals and values. According to Naji, “arrogant, almighty power” is of no value to a superpower without social cohesion.

In fact, great power, if overextended, may itself threaten the very social cohesion that creates and supports it. In a passage reminiscent of Sayyid Qutb's discussion of the global crisis of values, Naji introduces a key strategic concept that he calls "factors of cultural ruin" (*awamil al-fana' al-hadari*), which cause a society to lose cohesion and destroy itself. Sayyid Qutb considered many aspects of American society destructive or at least primitive and uncivilized. Naji's list includes: corruption of belief, loss of ethics, social iniquities, luxury, egotism, and a preference for pleasure and love of this world above all other values.³⁰ These factors may be active within a society or latent to some extent. If latent, the forces of cultural ruin may need to be catalyzed into action. The catalyst is terrorism. Naji refers to terrorist acts as harassing operations that prod the superpower to overextend itself to the point of exhaustion while simultaneously triggering the forces that destroy its social cohesion. Of course, these violent attacks are part of the dogma of al-Qaeda and other violent jihadist groups. They exhaust the target's will to fight, and by destroying its economy, they can trigger social collapse as well. Al-Qaeda saw this confirmed firsthand in the successful jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and they also studied General Giap's strategy against America in Vietnam.

Abu Bakr Naji asserts that the collapse of a great power can be achieved along three axes of influence. In a dominant country, military power, propaganda, and social cohesion all work together to produce real power and dominance. When one or more of these axes starts to fail, the others soon follow, and collapse ensues. In the case of a superpower like the Soviet Union, the military power was real when it entered Afghanistan in December 1979. According to Naji, the Soviet Union had the largest, most powerful land force in the world, with brutal soldiers who were able to cope with the rough conditions in Afghanistan. Soviet forces faced an enemy that was not comparable in any way and was much weaker militarily. Yet the Soviet Union not only lost in

Afghanistan; it collapsed at home. Why? Naji has an answer.

The beginning of the Soviet defeat was induced by the factors of cultural annihilation. He lists the factors that he estimated were the most important: atheistic ideology, love of the world, moral corruption, and social outrages (for example, embezzlement).³¹

Naji points out that the economic crisis induced by the “harassing” attacks on economic targets triggered these “factors,” and economic privation brought political opposition to life. Over time, he claims divisions began to worsen inside the Soviet Union, and the ethnic states began to secede, one after another. In addition, people at home, especially in the majority-Muslim areas, began to lose respect for the Russian Army. On the other side of the coin, the relatively weak jihadist forces’ success against the Soviet Union inspired other Muslims from neighboring states like Tajikistan and as far away as Chechnya to join the forces of jihad in Afghanistan.

In a passage meant to show how Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam predicted that the Soviet Union would fall, Naji reveals an interesting perspective. He asserts that the Afghan jihad succeeded not because the mujahedeen drove the Soviets out by force of arms but rather because harassing terrorist attacks goaded the Soviet Union into sending more and more troops into Afghanistan. As Naji interprets Paul Kennedy: the stronger a power is, the more likely it is to overextend and ultimately to destroy its own economy, which is in great part the engine of its power. When one adds to that outcome the jihad’s deliberate and direct attack on the strained economic infrastructure, one has the recipe for the victory of the jihadists. Naji makes the case that what worked against Russia will work against America, and he will return to this point later in his study when he discusses the way forward with jihad against the United States. Whether the myth of the defeat of the Soviet Union is true in detail is not critical to predict violent jihadist intentions. What is critical is that the al-Qaeda

leadership believes this version of events. The truth of al-Qaeda's insights about the Soviet Union and even more about the United States, however, will be crucial to the discussion concerning how the world should counter al-Qaeda's strategy in the deep battle.

To address the question whether the Americans can be defeated as the Soviet Union was, Naji points out that the United States occupies the same place in the world previously occupied by both superpowers. Moreover, America was able to consolidate the new world order to its designs. The strategy that Naji is trying to sell to his jihadist audience did not become easier after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Instead, the picture became darker to some of the most eminent people—both Muslims and others—in the countries submitting to this world order. In their opinion, the remaining superpower (*qutb*) would be more difficult to destroy and the components of its power differ in kind from those of the collapsed superpower, especially the media halo, which is many times stronger than the media halo of the collapsed superpower.³²

In reply, Naji argues in effect that “we” beat the Russians, and they were twice as tough as the Americans, who have grown soft because of their love of luxury. Furthermore, if the Americans take one-tenth of the casualties that the Russians suffered in Afghanistan and Chechnya, they will cut and run, heedless of the consequences. In addition, the logistical challenge is far greater for the Americans than it was for the Russians. Naji concludes that the Americans can be made to understand all this “if we decide to refuse [to submit], but only if we decide to refuse and inflame the opposition to prove it.”³³ After laying out the pros and cons of jihad against the Americans, Naji states: “This was the picture until the events of September and their groundwork, which began with the events in Nairobi [Kenya] and Dar es Salaam [Tanzania].” Naji is referring to the bombing of American embassies in East Africa on August 7, 1998, in

which 240 were killed and some four thousand were wounded, most of whom were Africans.³⁴ These bombings occurred approximately six months after Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri declared war on America.³⁵

Naji is claiming that the bleeding war with America began in East Africa and continued through the 9/11 attacks. The strategy he is about to summarize encompasses these attacks and applies to the expanded operations al-Qaeda was about to launch after its expulsion from Afghanistan. The summary lends itself to an outline of goals and means as follows:

1. First goal—Destroy an important part of respect for America and build self-confidence in Muslims by:
 - Revealing the deceptive media halo to be a power that does not conquer
 - Forcing America to abandon proxies and attack Muslims directly
2. Second Goal—Replace human losses to Islamic Renewal Movement over the last thirty years by:
 - Dazzling potential recruits through jihadist operations against America
 - Angering potential recruits by emphasizing America's direct interference in the Islamic World and support for Israel
 - Transforming suppressed anger towards apostate regimes into committed anger
3. Third Goal—Exposing the weakness of American power by pushing the U.S. to:
 - Abandon psychological warfare
 - Abandon proxy forces
 - Fight Muslims directly³⁶

Abu Bakr Naji will develop this bare outline in much greater detail, but it already reveals how central propaganda and manipulation of the media are to al-Qaeda. The most important step is to goad Americans to engage Muslim communities directly in battle so that al-Qaeda and its sympathizers can turn that engagement into a media bonanza.

If some would-be terrorist leaders could be convinced of the validity of Naji's interpretation of Paul Kennedy's doctrine of great-power overextension, might they not be persuaded that a local insurgency with global goals could be effective even against the United States? Might such an insurgency serve a larger cause with which other jihadist groups agree, especially if al-Qaeda can coordinate a number of such insurgencies against American allies, to prevent the United States from bringing its full force to bear on any one front? Such a scenario would be intended to make international Muslim communities engage over a vast global battlefield in which Americans would play the part of Japan and Muslim communities together would play the part of Mao's China. The strategy that Naji espouses worked within Mao's framework. Mao claimed that guerrilla warfare rose to the level of strategy because China was vast and weak and Japan, while strong, did not have the manpower to control all the contested area of the Chinese landscape. Mao's guerrillas could attack the Japanese where they were weak and avoid them where they were strong to win a protracted war of the flea. The Muslim ummah, according to Naji, is weak, but its territory is vast. If Muslim communities can engage America over this vast landscape, they too could win the war of the flea, in what al-Qurashi referred to as fourth-generation or asymmetric warfare.

FIRST TOPIC: DEFINITION OF ADMINISTRATION OF SAVAGERY AND ITS HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Naji begins this topic by quoting word for word from his preface, a practice that might be a useful teaching aid if the book was in part intended to be delivered as a series

of lectures.³⁷ He claims that when empires and countries collapse they tend to break into smaller anarchical portions, which may later become new states unless some larger state or consortium of states, as with the Sykes-Picot agreement, intervenes to define new countries and spheres of influence. Naji begins the substantive discussion by stating that the administration of savagery may be defined in a very few words as “the administration of savage anarchy” (*fawda*).³⁸ He continues:

As for the detailed definition, it varies of course according to the goals and nature of the individuals in this “administration.” If we imagine it in its original form, we find it takes the shape of: administering to people’s everyday needs, providing food and medicine as well as preservation of security and deciding issues between people who are living in the regions of the administration of savagery; [it also entails] in addition to setting up defensive fortifications, securing the borders through groups that deter anyone from attempting to commit aggression against the regions of savagery. Providing the daily needs of people for food and medicine might develop into taking on the responsibility for offering services such as education and the like; and preserving order and securing the borders might develop into expanding the region of savagery.³⁹

Naji could be describing the works of some Islamic groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, when a central government, however powerful, cannot provide basic services to ordinary citizens. In these cases, the programs operate not in a situation of actual anarchy but rather in circumstances of deep poverty. James Toth wrote about the success Islamic groups had in educational and medical programs in the southern part of Egypt starting in the 1970s.⁴⁰ He was impressed by the ability of Islamic organizations to run successful

programs when neither the central government nor foreign secular organizations with greater resources enjoyed much return on apparently much larger investments. “But, as I discovered,” Toth writes, “because secular foreign operations such as the one I managed lacked the political insight and skills necessary to implement their programs successfully, the smaller but more astute Islamic organizations were much more effective.” Other examples could be added, but the key point is that Naji is not writing propaganda when he writes about the provision of basic services within savage societal conditions. He is speaking from his study of history and likely his own experience.

Naji uses Afghanistan before the rule of the Taliban to illustrate the stage of savage chaos that is the precursor to the administration of savagery:

The region of savagery before its submission to administration will be in a situation that resembles the situation in Afghanistan before the rule of the Taliban, a region that is submitting to the law of the jungle in its original form, with its good people (and even its evil people possessed of reason) thirsting for someone to administer this savage anarchy; perhaps one should say that they will accept any organization that can direct this savage anarchy be it good or evil. If the administration is of evil people, however, it is possible that the region will become even more savage!⁴¹

The Arabic root of *tawahhush*, generally translated as “savagery,” carries the connotation of a wild place or beast of some kind. People living within *tawahhush* are in a Hobbesian state where the brutal law of nature applies, and they often will accept any group offering some semblance of order, even if it resembles a gang more than a government. The people living in such a region do not have to like or support the al-Qaeda-inspired approach to jihad to feel compelled to join forces with jihadists in a fight against foreign forces.

Providing money and training may go hand in hand. If al-Qaeda can funnel money to poor families when they offer a son for jihad training, the family may then be able to educate another son while the son offered to the Taliban learns a radical version of Islam. This raises another counterintuitive fact about al-Qaeda. The organization does better, by their own admission, with young men who have not had a religious education than with those who have.⁴² One of the major features of the Egyptian, Saudi, and Libyan deradicalization programs was to expose captured al-Qaeda members to mainstream religious scholars who can challenge al-Qaeda's ideology through arguments based on the Qur'an, hadith, and recognized traditions of interpretation.

To illustrate his model, Abu Bakr Naji describes actual historical precedents of the administration of savagery. For example, he claims the earliest Islamic state in Medina was established in the context of the pre-Islamic tribal system in the Arabian Peninsula, which was based on the administration of savagery.⁴³ He follows examples during the Crusades and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir with modern ones. He states that it became difficult to establish these primitive governing arrangements after the Sykes-Picot agreement, the creation of the United Nations, and the international order that emerged after World War II, which recognizes only the modern states and established borders. Even in these global conditions, some administrations of savagery were created in remote areas far from the centers of power, where circumstances of geography and the inhabitants facilitated their establishment.

There are a number of examples of [such] contemporary groups, Islamic, leftist, and otherwise to include: the combatant groups in Afghanistan in the first stages of jihad and the first stages of the Taliban Movement until the establishment of its state—may Allah return it to

power and high standing—regardless of how close these administrations are to the ideal, realistic Islamic concept or how remote [they are] from it even to the point of opposing it.⁴⁴

Naji's list of Islamic examples of the administration of savagery also includes the Abu Sayyaf movement, the Moro Liberation Front in the Philippines, the jihadist groups in Algeria during the 1990s, Somalia after Siad Barre, and the temporary administrations in Chechnya and some areas of the former Soviet Union.⁴⁵

Some Islamic movements intended to set up administrations of savagery but never moved to the stage when any administration was possible. Naji saw these movements as engaging in terrorist operations to create the conditions for the administration of savagery but without ever exhausting the central governments with which they engaged. He considers Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian territories, the Islamic Group in Egypt during the 1990s, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group to be in this category. Naji comments that this stage prior to the establishment of the administration of savagery is the stage “through which we are now passing,” by which he refers to the period of full confrontation between al-Qaeda and the United States as a consequence of the 9/11 attacks. In this stage, al-Qaeda desperately needs to own some piece of land they can call an Islamic emirate. Their efforts are being frustrated, but Naji would have jihadists continue the “battle of patience” in the protracted war.

When Naji lists non-Muslim movements engaged in administering chaos, he mentions John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Movement, a southern Sudan rebellion he led from 1983 until his death in 2005. The non-Muslim shadow governments most interesting to Naji, however, were the left-wing movements in Latin America that had been supported by the Soviet Union. Naji points out that these movements have been quite successful and even set up small states, although they ruled according to “filthy” principles (communist

principles, but also drug running and kidnapping, especially when the Soviet Union fell and stopped subsidizing them). According to Naji, these “filthy” ways make these groups unattractive to people of surrounding regions who are therefore unwilling to turn away from central governments. Al-Qaeda strategists, including Naji, studied Castro’s revolution and are familiar with the thinking of Che Guevara and others in Castro’s orbit. Naji thought Castro’s adaptation of classic communist guerrilla strategy could be the answer to the needs of al-Qaeda to wage the war of those “thought to be weak” against the strong. Like Bin Laden, Castro’s followers viewed him as both a warrior and an ideological guide, and his most attractive characteristic was his ability to frustrate the United States. At the same time, by describing why Castro-inspired movements failed to spread, Naji is indicating he understands that communism’s ideology would need to be set aside in favor of al-Qaeda’s Salafist jihad-ism because Salafism, unlike communism, appeals to many conservative Muslim societies.

SECOND TOPIC: ESTABLISHING AN ISLAMIC STATE

In this topic, Abu Bakr Naji reveals more of his grand strategy for establishing an Islamic state along Salafist jihadist lines and gives us firsthand insight into al-Qaeda’s planning process, which for major operations sometimes extends for years.⁴⁶ In the course of this “investigation,” Naji also discusses goals, priorities, and the means to achieve them. Naji provides the principles that guided the choice of the priorities and points out that the strategy is flexible. Priorities have changed, and they will likely change again. The author makes it clear that he is not personally recommending these priorities; rather, he is describing the decisions made by al-Qaeda’s top leadership.

Naji reviews the stages that individual countries of the target ummah must go through.⁴⁷ He lists the stages of classic guerrilla warfare (stated in his own idiosyncratic terms), but this time he applies them to two

broad categories: the priority group of countries (like Saudi Arabia and Yemen) and the remaining priority countries (like Egypt and even Israel). The first-tier priority states are so categorized not because they are more important but because al-Qaeda's leadership considered them more feasible candidates, with their physical and political characteristics creating the climate for revolution, "jihad," in al-Qaeda's terms. In the first-tier priority countries, therefore, Naji calls for a full, classic, three-stage guerrilla revolution. The second-tier priorities are countries like Egypt, which are not ripe for the kind of revolution Naji contemplates. For the second-tier countries, Naji recommends that jihadist groups violently attack the central government to weaken it but stop short of engaging in a full guerrilla war, which would likely fail and end up destroying the jihadist movement. After noting Naji's caveat that (however unlikely) second-tier priority states could still pass through the same stages as first-tier priority states, we may recategorize the stages of jihad as:

Three Stages of Jihad for Priority States (classic guerrilla strategy)

1. Causing "damage and exhaustion" (*al-nikayah wa al-inhak*) to the apostate country through terrorism, guerrilla warfare
2. Establishing the administration of savagery in areas from which the central government has withdrawn its forces
3. Creating an Islamic state through a decisive battle or series of battles and transition from administration of savagery to a fully governed polity under al-Qaeda's version of shari'ah

Two Stages of Jihad for Nonpriority States (terrorism without guerrilla war)

1. Causing damage and exhaustion to the target state through terrorism aimed at weakening the structure of the state

2. Establishing the state through intervention by an outside Muslim power when circumstances allow⁴⁸

Naji proceeds to describe the top-tier countries for al-Qaeda's leadership and how they were chosen. When he speaks about priorities, he refers to the "research" of another al-Qaeda political military strategist, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, although he uses one of Suri's aliases, Umar Abd al-Hakim, with which al-Suri sometimes signed his written works.⁴⁹ Al-Suri had not finished his magnum opus, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, at the time Naji was writing, but he had previously written about Central Asia, North Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula. Naji claims that these research studies and perhaps others were written in the three years preceding the attacks of 9/11, which suggests that after Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri declared war on the United States, the intellectuals of the violent jihadist movement began studying the best possibilities for jihad to present them for al-Qaeda leadership approval.⁵⁰ Naji tells us that upon receiving these studies, the "leadership" announced some modifications and rejected an unspecified number of countries that had been placed in the top priority category; they then directed that the rejected countries move to the secondary list of countries not quite ready for jihad, the second-tier priorities described above. Evidently the leadership, presumably Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, added two countries to the priority list: Saudi Arabia and Nigeria.

Naji lists the high-priority countries approved by al-Qaeda's leadership in this order: Jordan, North Africa (west of Egypt), Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. He lists their desirable characteristics as:

- Geographic depth and terrain conducive to guerrilla operations—ideally mountains distant from enemy centers of power
- Weakness of the central government, especially in its ability to control the peripheries of the

country, its borders, and some internal regions with high-density populations

- The presence of jihadists and strong Salafist preachers
- A tough population of primarily Muslims without strong national cohesion
- A wide distribution of weapons among the people and an ability to use them⁵¹

Naji also states that jihadists in priority countries need to determine what they can do to carry out jihad. He cautions them to contemplate deeply and be honest about whether their factions can work together for a common goal. It is noteworthy that Afghanistan is not on the list. Naji does not tell us why, but perhaps it is natural for al-Qaeda, as an organization just thrown out of Afghanistan, to wish the Taliban well and move on. Clearly, the Taliban leaders and fighters have absorbed what al-Qaeda had to teach and know better than anyone how to perform jihad (i.e., fight a guerrilla war) in their own country.

Iraq is also missing from al-Qaeda's priorities, which at the time Naji was writing were priorities determined by Bin Laden with heavy influence from al-Zawahiri. The United States had invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003. Naji spends very little time talking about Iraq, even though the American invasion was the most important geostrategic event occurring in the region. He does make a reference to large operations being undertaken there, but it is not listed as a priority state for jihad. There is no question that the American invasion hurt Bin Laden's plans for the Arabian Peninsula, which had always been his key objective. At the same time, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi gave his pledge (*bay'ah*) of loyalty on October 17, 2004, after months of negotiations, thereby making his organization in Iraq an al-Qaeda affiliate. Both Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden had previously praised his operations in Iraq and continued providing rhetorical support, though without being able to

offer anything concrete.⁵² The American invasion of Iraq was a gift to al-Qaeda as an idea and a brand, but it did little to advance Bin Laden's goals. With its majority Shi'ah population and the looming attention of Iran, Iraq was not an ideal fit for successful guerrilla warfare along al-Qaeda's model, although it could become a proxy battleground for Iran and Saudi Arabia in which al-Qaeda could continue clandestine operations.

Both Afghanistan and Iraq were instances of classic jihad against non-Muslim invaders from the perspective of those with classic jihadist sympathies in the Gulf. Bin Laden and his organization tried to ride this wave in Afghanistan and failed. Iraq was on its own course. Al-Qaeda's global jihad and its priority list were meant for operations where al-Qaeda's guidance and what Naji calls logistical support could make a difference and where the United States' strategic interests could be harmed. Logistical support as defined by Naji means money, safe houses for transferring people from place to place and providing temporary shelter, and help with the international media.

Naji does not claim that all high-priority countries have all the prerequisites for jihad, but he rejoices in the fact that most have mountains and other geographic features, including remote populated areas. Naji clarifies that he is not, strictly speaking, referring to countries in the list above. He does not recognize them as countries. Instead he means a city, a village or two, districts, or even part of a city. He also points out that at the time he was writing, two or three of the priority countries would be sufficient for jihad. The objective is to weaken American effectiveness by multiplying the theaters for military action. It is equally important that violent jihadists not overextend their own resources. Naji encourages local jihadists in second-tier countries to carry out terrorist operations as long as they do not expect al-Qaeda to be able to help.

The contemplated grand strategy, as Naji describes it, is designed to be flexible and allow a great deal of

autonomy by those in operational franchises. The central organization of al-Qaeda as early as 2002 and 2003 had become less important operationally; instead al-Qaeda had become primarily an ideology with a public face, a coordinator in chief, a fund raiser and funds dispenser, and a system with worldwide connections.⁵³ These attributes make al-Qaeda more dangerous in the long run as long as its revolutionary ideology and closely related strategy have credibility with significant portions of susceptible Muslim populations.

To clarify his intention, Naji explains the goals for each of the major stages of jihad. The first stage, “the power of causing damage and exhaustion” (*al-nikayah wa al-inhak*), has the following goals:

- Exhausting the forces of the enemy and the regimes collaborating with them, dispersing their efforts, and working to make them unable to catch their breath
- Attracting new youth to the jihadist struggle by undertaking high-value operations that will grab people’s attention
- Removing the control of the local regimes over the area that has been declared a priority
- Training [cadres] psychologically and operationally for the stage of the administration of savagery⁵⁴

When speaking of “high-value operations,” in this instance Naji is referring both to medium-size operations with high media impact, like those in Bali, al-Muhayya in Saudi Arabia, Djerba in Tunisia, and operations in Turkey, as well as large operations in Iraq. He does not mean operations of the magnitude of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which could distract from the tempo of smaller and medium-size attacks. If a group does have a plan for a large, dramatic attack, however, Naji advises against executing it without knowing the view of the “top leadership,” presumably Bin Laden before his death and

al-Zawahiri. He also points out that a large, complex attack may require resources and connections that only al-Qaeda could provide.⁵⁵

Perhaps making a virtue of necessity, al-Qaeda's strategy as expressed by Naji indicates no intent to reassert central control. He points out, however, that small operations in the hands of inexperienced groups may be counterproductive because they may cause problems or allow the "apostate" security forces to roll up nascent groups before they have time to make an impact. Nevertheless, these small operations are important and should continue. Once a group is experienced enough to take on medium-sized special operations, it should do so and continue to increase the tempo of operations. Ultimately, it should be possible to carry out larger numbers of both small- and medium-sized operations at the same time.⁵⁶

Naji maintains that the purpose of repeated terrorist operations is to remove the affected region from the control of the central government. Theoretically, in a priority country, the region will be in an area in which jihadist groups have come together to create an administrative structure within the savage chaos they have created. It is ideal for the groups to pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda, thus allowing for greater coordination and possibly greater impact by being connected to a group with well-known fundraising prowess and international jihadist ties. But even when affiliated groups or those often referred to as al-Qaeda franchises are involved, al-Qaeda does not expect or desire them to consult with top leadership about medium-size operations.

Clandestine groups cannot maintain operational security if their communications with leadership can be tracked; this is of course equally dangerous for al-Qaeda's leadership. The killing of Bin Laden by American forces is perhaps the clearest demonstration of the risk of communications between the center and

the organization, which even an elaborate system of trusted couriers failed to mitigate.

The enterprise plan or project (*mashru'*) that Naji has described turns conventional wisdom on its head. It assumes that command and control is local and, at its best, clandestine. Where conventional strategists would expect an organizational connection between the goals of a strategy and the means to achieve those goals, al-Qaeda, inspired by 4GW, seems to have disconnected many of the means of achieving goals from the organization. The main connection is through the ideology and a shared grand strategy with America as the unifying enemy. Al-Qaeda's strategic mistake is trying to maintain a 4GW strategy within al-Zawahiri's imperative to establish a state in the heart of traditional Muslim lands. With America as its chief enemy, such a state is a trap for al-Qaeda's assets in it.

When Naji turns to the goals of the second stage of jihad, the administration of savagery in priority countries, he produces the same list of requirements, with a single addition. It seems peculiar to reiterate these requirements while recasting them as goals. There are several possible reasons for this deliberate redundancy. We must first rule out the possibility that he forgot or that different people wrote these passages and the later writer did not have access to the previous work. The second passage clearly refers to the first passage and tells the reader the title under which these requirements/goals may be found. Another reason may be that the study is being written serially, and these goals are so important that Naji wanted to make sure that the reader or student knows them well. Of course, adding an extra requirement/goal draws attention to the addition and prompts another question: why is it on one list and not the other? The addition is introduced as a "future goal," which is "the development of administrative groups in order to achieve the power of establishing [the state] and to prepare to reap the benefits of [lit.: 'to pluck the fruit'] when the state is set up."⁵⁷

The fact that the author cites this goal as “future” indicates that the leadership did not believe that an actual Islamic emirate along the lines described by Naji was imminent and that there was substantial doubt that accountants or government managers could be enticed to join the jihad to administer the newly liberated region. This makes sense in the context of the losing battle being waged in Saudi Arabia at the time. Thus this goal is more of a marker that building a viable government requires a great deal more than causing or taking advantage of chaos, whether in remote, mountainous locations or among the population of a Middle Eastern city.

Naji lists al-Qaeda’s three goals for nonpriority regions that have not fallen into savage chaos:

- “Continue causing damage and exhaustion to the extent possible”
- “Establish a logistic support network for savage regions administered by us, whether they are near or far”
- “If a conflict arises between carrying out harassing attacks and setting up a logistical support network, the most suitable and useful [alternative] should be the priority”⁵⁸

Naji is deliberately being imprecise. The one clear conclusion that we may draw from the bullets above is that the nonpriority countries are truly independent of al-Qaeda beyond vague logistic support. They are being urged to follow al-Qaeda’s strategic lead but are bound by no specific obligation even to help a region that has advanced to the stage of the administration of savagery. Even here they are allowed the option of choosing the most suitable or appropriate course of action.

There is a much closer relationship between al-Qaeda and its top leadership to priority states like Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Naji is not clear about this relationship. We have noticed a number of times that al-

Qaeda does not intend to have a command-and-control relationship with regions undergoing jihad according to al-Qaeda guidelines. On the other hand, the *bay'ah* or pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda is a powerful tool to ensure top-level coordination between franchises in Saudi Arabia or Yemen, for example, and the “top leadership” of the central organization. Close coordination is urged for operations only when terrorist operations reach a certain complexity and impact beyond bomb attacks, which have become unremarkable across the Middle East. One powerful motive for the coordination of major terrorist attacks (despite the inherent danger of such coordination) is the need to avoid Muslim casualties; if local civilian Muslims are killed in terrorist attacks, the repercussions for al-Qaeda are always very serious and can become disruptive for al-Qaeda’s plans.

Action Plan

Now that Abu Bakr Naji has detailed the general outline and goals of the enterprise plan (*mashru'*) that he has described on behalf of al-Qaeda’s top leadership, he pauses to take stock of the situation at the time of writing his book. The author refers to a rising sequence of attacks culminating in 9/11. On behalf of Salafist jihad, Naji takes credit for the success of al-Qaeda’s attacks in bringing America to the region through the invasion of Afghanistan. (He does not mention Iraq.) He diminishes the impact of the early American success in Afghanistan by pointing out that the Taliban government might have fallen of its own accord in any case. There seems to be a critical undercurrent against the Taliban in this and other subtle statements by Naji. He does not dwell on this, but we cannot avoid the impression that Afghanistan was not a long-term priority for al-Qaeda despite all the statements of support for the Taliban.⁵⁹ Instead, Afghanistan was intended as a trap for America. The attacks of 9/11 and the American invasion of Afghanistan, according to Naji, hurt American prestige in the region and prompted a level of recruitment into al-

Qaeda's ranks that made up several times over for the attrition suffered by jihadists in the 1990s. These events have also chipped away at the two great advantages that Naji gave to the United States at the beginning of his book: almighty power and a false media halo that had convinced the masses of people in the Middle East that America was to be both feared and loved.

According to al-Qaeda's plan, with American forces in the region, the United States faces two options, each matched by a trap set by violent jihadists. Either the United States will seek further revenge and operations will intensify and cause a backlash, or the United States will seek a limited war, which will not achieve its objective of curbing the expansion of jihadist attacks. Naji claims the United States has already fallen into the first trap in its invasion of Afghanistan. According to Naji, if America cannot meet all its military goals and Afghani jihadists can hold out against American forces for "a year or two or more," then the ordinary people and some of the leaders of the "armies of apostasy" will conclude that America can be resisted. The attacks against America will multiply, and the United States will conclude that its client regimes cannot protect it from attacks.

Thus, Naji claims the United States will not find itself fighting a limited war against a state, which was the choice it thought it had made; instead it will be confronted by nonstate actors of various nationalities in what al-Qurashi referred to as fourth-generation warfare. Instead of fighting a conventional army, American forces will be forced to attack Muslim citizens of states allied to the United States who have traveled to join the jihad and are living among ordinary people in the country where American forces are deployed. When American forces use their well-known overwhelming power, they will inevitably kill ordinary local people as well as jihadists. At this point Naji claims the "American administration will begin to realize that the concept of more than one war at a time is a completely theoretical construct suitable for paper only."⁶⁰

In addition to the ongoing jihad in Saudi Arabia, Naji recommends widespread attacks against the “Crusader/Zionist” enemy. The examples in Naji’s action plan are mostly soft targets, and he gives the economic multiplier effect for each:

- Tourist resort in Bali—increased spending by security apparatuses worldwide
- Commercial bank in Turkey—banks belonging to “Crusaders” will need to be protected throughout the world
- Oil interests near Aden, Yemen—intensive security measures for tankers, pipelines, and facilities worldwide
- Two “apostate” authors killed simultaneously in two different countries—thousands of authors will need security in other Islamic countries⁶¹

These illustrative attacks are to be carried out by independent small groups worldwide that are following the Salafist jihadist current.⁶² The attacks should be repeated with increased tempo to magnify the psychological and material effect. Theoretically, moreover, terrorists acting independently within a careful cell structure would be difficult and expensive for security forces to detect. The main purpose of such attacks is to trigger spending, increasing the likelihood that the target will overextend its military and security commitment, leading to its economic collapse and downfall.⁶³

Attacking the petroleum industry anywhere in the world serves al-Qaeda’s strategy. Of course, any attack against Saudi Arabia is an attack against the West’s petroleum interests. Naji makes it clear that attacks against specific petroleum installations present real challenges for local governments as well. For example, he states that the limited forces of “apostate” regimes are stretched thin to cover the following four top priorities for them:

1. Personal protection of ruling families and governing bodies
2. Foreigners
3. Petroleum and economy (infrastructure)
4. Places of pleasure

If these priorities have become hardened targets, Naji recommends attacking isolated military and security forces and stealing weapons from their warehouses. When people see the military fleeing and the jihadists in possession of its weapons, savagery and chaos will begin to take root. Moreover, the central government and its forces will be exhausted by the continual attacks across the spectrum of targets.

After a diversion into a potential justification for attacking petroleum targets to address the concerns of the local Muslim population, Naji turns to reframing the plan of creating a viable region for the administration of savagery. Naji points out that when a region of savage chaos is in a priority region near to “our groups,” al-Qaeda should move in to “administer the region of savagery” after determining whether there are kindred souls within the region who may provide support. Naji then recounts the plan he has just described in concise bullet points:

- Military strategy to disperse the efforts and forces of the enemy and to exhaust their military and financial capacity
- Media strategy aimed at and focused on two groups: the first is the ordinary people to push the largest number of them to join the jihad, to establish support for jihad and disdain for those who do not join the ranks; the second group is the enemy soldiers who have low pay to push them to join the ranks of the mujahedeen or at least to flee the service of the enemy⁶⁴

When Naji writes about developing further elements of Salafist jihadist strategy, he continues to talk in general terms fully responsive to the requirements of global jihad, which never accepts a nationalist purpose. Nevertheless, the factors he lists all have an echo of what became the jihad in Saudi Arabia during the period from 2003 to 2006 and are reflected in the plans and activities of AQAP operating from remote provinces in Yemen in 2012:

- Developing a military strategy to push enemy forces to position themselves around economic targets to secure them
- Developing a media strategy to reach and target the center of the midlevel leadership of the armies of apostasy
- Planning, preparing, and drilling to exploit the results of the previous points—the occurrence of chaos and savagery
- Establishing a media plan targeted in all these stages at rational, legal justification for operations, especially for ordinary people.⁶⁵

Naji notes that local people are not dependable, and no plan that relies on the people can be successful. Nevertheless, the media campaign is necessary to gain their sympathy, if not their support, or at least keep them neutralized. The problem for Naji and al-Qaeda is that the leadership, especially the religious leadership, works to get the people to oppose al-Qaeda. Despite this, Naji asserts that the people are still a storehouse of potential action if only Salafist jihadists can separate the leaders, whom he refers to as “evil shaykhs,” from the ordinary people. Naji is referring to the official religious leaders in Saudi Arabia and others, like the Sahwah scholars who supported or cooperated with Saudi rulers and who question the validity of al-Qaeda’s religious opinions, especially about jihad. It is also clear that when al-Qaeda recruited Saudis to its ranks, it obscured its intent to overthrow the Saudi state because its citizens were not

prepared to accept such a goal. In describing his media plan in general terms, Naji argues that it should be tailored to the way of thinking of ordinary people; he recommends addressing the issues that ordinary people have that prevent them from joining the ranks of jihad. Such a plan was never successful.

THIRD TOPIC: PROBLEMS, OBSTACLES, AND WAYS TO DEAL WITH THEM

After explaining al-Qaeda's broad strategy and plan of action, Naji turns in his next "investigation" to the practical steps needed to turn the action plan into reality. He emphasizes the need to increase administrative talent within jihadist organizations. He is concerned that as jihadist organizations defeat local security forces and establish regions that may be ready for the administration of savagery, jihadists will need to manage within a vastly diminished or nonexistent governance structure. Al-Qaeda and its franchises will need administrators that are familiar with modern management techniques.⁶⁶ Naji argues that recent books on modern management are very useful and can be obtained on the Internet. Naji recommends the online source Mufakkirat al-Islam (Notebook of Islam).⁶⁷ Bruce Hoffman discussed the importance of administration and management to al-Qaeda as early as 2002 when he pointed out that Bin Laden studied not theology but business and administration.⁶⁸ Naji's references to Internet sources of management knowledge reflect the technological proclivities of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's organization, which has been led by men trained to be engineers or physicians. This aspect of al-Qaeda's personnel profile makes for an organization that produces obsessive planners but bad theologians.

Naji recognizes that learning without experience can lead jihadist leaders to make serious mistakes. One of the most common errors is targeting entire classes of people in jihad. Naji claims this can be an error either of commission or omission—targeting or not targeting. Naji writes of a young man in Egypt who studied books like

The Pillar for the Preparation of the Many, written by Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz (also known as Sayyid Imam al-Sharif and Dr. Fadl), which is a book of jurisprudence as it applies to jihad.⁶⁹ According to Naji, this young man founded his own group, but because it was not affiliated with any established jihadist groups, he lacked access to experienced people and was not careful to avoid killing Muslims who were viewed as innocent of any wrongdoing. Naji claimed that he followed a valid rule stating basically that if one cannot tell the status of some individuals in a group targeted for an attack, one may proceed anyway if the greater good can be achieved. Naji asserts that this is a good rule when applied to countries that are mostly non-Muslim but can lead to disaster in majority-Muslim countries. Naji also refers to the infamous case of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria, whose activities targeted people indiscriminately, which he describes as following the rule “whoever is not with us is against us.”⁷⁰ Naji then gives examples of groups reluctant to target groups of people that should be targeted. Occasionally, the high leadership may determine for tactical reasons that targeting a group should be delayed, but Naji cautions his readers to be wary of “the pedant who determines that the cause of this delay is that targeting these groups is not permissible.”⁷¹

Reliance on Military Principles Based on Experience

Naji understands that it is not efficient or effective to consult the leadership on everyday tactical decisions. For this reason, it is important to raise the general level of leadership experience among jihadists. The relative lack of administrative cadres and sound, experienced leaders is a key weakness and continual threat to al-Qaeda and its associates. Naji claims that the problems in Algeria arose after experienced leaders were killed and well-intentioned second-tier, inexperienced individuals rose to leadership positions. Ironically, al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia made exactly the mistake Naji is

criticizing, and as Saudi security forces killed experienced leaders, the problem became more acute.

Next, Naji turns to raising the level of military thinking within dispersed affiliates.⁷² Once again, Naji is willing to borrow from the enemies' rulebooks when they can help with his violent project. In the new post-Afghanistan conceptual strategy, al-Qaeda will rely on widely dispersed jihadist groups, which may be franchises or individual terrorist cells. Naji and other strategic writers examine the past mistakes of other failed groups so al-Qaeda can avoid them in the future. The positive corollary to this lessons-learned approach is identifying and following rules of combat that have been tested by experience and learning the "political game." Naji explains his premise succinctly:

Following military principles [drawn from] experience will cut short the long years in which we might [otherwise] suffer the evils of rigid [attitudes] and random [behavior]. Abandoning randomness and adopting well-studied, scientific methods and military principles [drawn from] experience [i.e.,] actually curtailing randomness by the application of military science will facilitate achieving our goals without complications and make it possible for us to develop and improve our performance, with Allah's permission.

Teaching individuals these principles will open a wide vista for creativity before their eyes. Extraordinary leaders may emerge who will write their theories in the books of modern history, especially since the books of this kind in our time ignore the fact that most of their principles are taken from the ways of our ancestors.⁷³

Calling for an end to undisciplined behavior caused by too much zeal is nothing new to al-Qaeda's strategic thought. It is a theme that Ayman al-Zawahiri sounded clearly in *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, and it is echoed by all prominent strategic writers. But what are

the scientific military principles that will benefit al-Qaeda? To forge an answer to this question, Naji proceeds to review principles found in any textbook on military tactics of guerrilla groups dealing successfully with more powerful enemies. Naji breaks no new ground in recommending tactics described in classic European or Chinese texts. In the midst of rather unremarkable observations, Naji turns to a discussion of the best way for a weak force to defeat a stronger enemy: by draining the great power militarily and economically. To remind us all that al-Qaeda's strategy is not merely about the struggle of the weak against the strong—rather, it is about the weak nonstate actor confronting the strongest nation—Naji quotes former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld exclaiming to reporters: “What more can we do? Don't forget that we are spending billions against an enemy that is spending millions.”⁷⁴

Achieving Power

The fifth chapter of this investigation into obstacles and solutions to achieving the goals of jihad addresses the problem of attaining power.⁷⁵ Ever since Sayyid Qutb first formulated his approach to jihad, it was clear that jihad without territory to govern is meaningless theory. Qutb held that an ummah without territory is no ummah, a position reiterated by al-Zawahiri. Naji has been describing how jihadists may create or enhance chaos, provide governance over these chaotic regions to replace a central apostate government, and eventually expand these regions and combine them into a universal federation of Islamic states or ummah. Naji must address how any “emirate” would hold together and defend itself from a position of obvious conventional military weakness. In effect, having created the new minimalist state, how will jihadists create the power to hold it? He states that power is achieved by means of a kind of faith-based mutual reliance or friendship within a group (*bi al-muwalah al-imaniyyah*).⁷⁶ This interrelationship is close to a tribal relationship, except it is between states that have pledged allegiance first to the local commander

(emir) and then to a central authority. In the end state, this central authority might be a caliph; in the interim, the highest leadership of al-Qaeda or perhaps a council could serve in the place of a caliph.

In a tribe, every man relies on every other for his honor. To attack one man is to attack his brother, to attack a man's family is to attack his clan, and to attack his village is to attack his entire tribe. No level in this honor system will allow injuries to occur to its members at its level with impunity. Such relationships are based on honor, not an abstract concept of justice, and the ties of honor are very strong indeed.⁷⁷ Naji explains the term *muwalah imaniyyah* (faith-based mutual interrelationship) by its effect on the enemy.

If the enemy knows that if it were to defeat part of a group, the rest would surrender, we are able to say that this group has not achieved power. However, when the enemy knows that if it were to annihilate part of a group but vengeance for their blood is taken up by the rest of the group and its goals [for vengeance] will endure until the last one of [the group] dies, then this group has indeed achieved power which the enemy fears, especially if the organization [behind] the group is hard to destroy at one blow.⁷⁸

Naji claims further, "the existence of bonds of faith among all these groups is like a contract written in blood, the most important clauses of which are blood for blood and destruction for destruction."⁷⁹ Naji correctly concludes that an enemy hesitates before embroiling itself in the meshes of this kind of fanaticism; however, he has turned out to be wrong that al-Qaeda's chosen enemies have been unable to oppose such a group. Saudi Arabia was able to "destroy" al-Qaeda's networks within Saudi Arabia in less than two years after the launch of the 2003 jihad. He was correct, however, in his assertion that if the group fights on even after a part, even a large part, is destroyed, it has achieved a kind of power that provides resilience, the ability of the group to

fight another day. That is exactly what happened to AQAP both in Yemen and in Saudi Arabia between 2004 and 2008–2009.⁸⁰

The policy of “paying the price” plays another role in creating the real power that Naji, and hence al-Qaeda, is seeking. To execute this policy, al-Qaeda needed affiliates or clandestine cells to carry it out in areas remote from the main theaters of action. Al-Qaeda, or more precisely AQAP, argued that jihad in Iraq and Saudi Arabia were compatible and mutually self-supporting. This argument becomes true only if there are groups willing to exact revenge for attacks against other groups, perhaps thousands of miles away on another continent. It requires groups to swear allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the central command, to Osama Bin Laden and now Ayman al-Zawahiri. Naji bemoans that groups are unwilling for selfish reasons to swear allegiance to the top leadership. He points out that if all the various jihadist groups were to join together and work for one another, they would constitute a power that would be very difficult for the United States and local Muslim governments to fight. It is likely that he had Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (the ultraviolent, original leader of jihad in Iraq) in mind, although he does not identify him. It is also possible that al-Zarqawi was in discussions with al-Qaeda about the issue even as Naji was writing. Al-Zarqawi ultimately did swear allegiance in October 2004 after months of negotiation. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb was created in January 2007, and AQAP was reconstituted in Yemen and consolidated the previous branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia into one group in January 2009. Naji could not foresee all these events, but he was writing as though such outcomes were part of al-Qaeda's grand strategy.

Naji is arguing for a new international pseudotribal structure cemented with formal ties of allegiance based on the Islamic precedence of *bay'ah* instead of the ties of blood relationship or nationalism. Naji knew that global jihad was very far from achieving these kinds of

relationships and far, therefore, from achieving great power. Phillip Carl Salzman, in his book about the relationship of tribalism to war and peace in the Middle East, writes about the kind of competitiveness over small measures of power that is normal within a Middle Eastern tribe. This individual competition, however, exists within the overall solidarity of a tribe held together by bonds of honor and a concept that Salzman calls “balanced opposition.” Salzman argues: “If there is a confrontation, small groups face opposing small groups, middle-sized groups face middle-sized groups, or large groups face opposing large groups: family vs. family, lineage vs. lineage, clan vs. clan, tribe vs. tribe, confederacy vs. confederacy, sect vs. sect, Islamic community (*ummah*) vs. the infidels.”⁸¹ Salzman claims that the balance that assures order is the balance of like-sized groups. Furthermore, Salzman seems to be making a very similar argument to Naji’s: “Any potential aggressor knows that his target is not solitary or meager, but is always, in principle, a formidable formation much the same size as his.” There is an internal corollary to this kind of social control and defense that is directly applicable to Naji’s call for the establishment of *muwalah iymaniyyah*, faith-based bonds of loyalty, quoted above. If such a relationship were fully established, for example, after United States forces killed Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi in an aerial attack in Iraq, a group far from Iraq would have been willing to risk themselves to attack a U.S. target of opportunity.

Salzman describes Middle Eastern tribal dynamics as decentralized and relatively nonhierarchical. Leaders are recognized as first among equals rather than superiors. Middle Eastern governments, on the other hand, tend to be highly centralized and hierarchical. A government’s success, and its power, can be judged by how much territory it controls outside the capital. In these terms, Egypt is strong and Yemen is weak. Hence, al-Qaeda’s strategists consider Egypt difficult ground for jihad, whereas Yemen is ideal. The organization that global jihadists need is the decentralized control characteristic

of a tribal confederation, even after al-Qaeda has obtained some territory to call its own, because the ummah is spread out across continents. Without a central core, such an organization is very hard to take out at one blow, in Naji's terms. Even if a powerful nation destroys that core, it will appear somewhere else in the virtual structure. In this sense, al-Qaeda has adopted the 4GW approach of a transnational threat without borders, a rear, or a center. Al-Qaeda is doomed to struggle with Mao's rule that guerrilla warfare requires secure bases, which become their rear areas. Because those bases are not secure from American military power, Naji is trying to address this through a strategy of exhausting American patience.

Naji is quick to recognize other difficulties with his scheme. The first is that al-Qaeda had not achieved adequate "faith-based allegiance" by Naji's time (or afterward). Even if such an arrangement were to be achieved, however, Naji points out that there will always be some groups in some places that are willing to sell out to the enemy. The only way to attack this issue, he claims, is to educate all levels of the affected populations with the goals of global jihad, which he simply calls "our goals," and to exchange pledges of allegiance. If global jihadists can persuade all groups and classes of Muslims to unite under common goals, all jihadists are strengthened. Another issue is the need to overlook flaws in groups of people willing to unite for the common good. This is a necessary step that is difficult to take by an organization dedicated to a very strict and censorious version of Islam.

Playing the Political Game

As important as military strategy and tactics are, Naji affords an equally high priority for jihad leaders learning the intricacies of the political game.⁸² He is not talking about al-Qaeda's leadership here (presumably they know the political game very well); rather, he is writing on behalf of al-Qaeda to other jihadist groups and new recruits to one of al-Qaeda's affiliates. Just as it is

important for military leaders to know the military strategy and tactics of their enemies and develop their own, it is equally important for those same leaders to study and know the political game. Naji also thinks that political decisions should be made by military leaders and not by those who do not join in the battle. In fact, the entire political cadre should be made up of warriors who assist the military leaders and those leaders themselves, who should concentrate on studying politics: "For the battle is their battle before it is anyone else's battle; and therefore it is necessary to emphasize the danger of leaving political decisions in the hands of those who do not engage in military battles under any pretext."⁸³

Thinking about jihad in Saudi Arabia and targeting the petroleum industry is the backstory to Naji's investigation of mastering the political game. The theory is meant to support action. His understanding of the history of jihad in the modern age is that those who ignore the political game by and large do not survive. One political mistake is as dangerous as many military mistakes. Also, the political game, like military science, is subject to the rules of pure human reason that Naji spoke of in his introduction. Naji goes so far as to state that the entirety of politics is not found in the shari'ah; it would be a grave mistake, he claims, if every rule of politics were challenged to find a specific justification for it in the shari'ah. It is enough for the political game pursued by jihadists to avoid contradicting the shari'ah. Furthermore, the rank and file in jihad must learn to trust the political decisions of their leaders because the rank and file is not schooled enough in politics to understand those decisions. But the problem is not with al-Qaeda's rank and file; the obstacle is the public that does not understand how killing innocents, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, is allowed within Islam. Appealing to human reason or universal laws does not address this moral issue.

Naji asserts that the politics of the enemy of jihadists is based on self-interest and that the allies of the enemy

generally bargain to obtain their interests in return for their support. He points out that this practical aspect of politics is captured in the Western saying, "Politics is the art of the possible." Seeking self-interest is a fragile basis for the alliance of the enemies, according to Naji's thinking. Self-interest is a commodity that may be changed by circumstances, especially if jihadists learn to play the political game. Jihadists need to learn that every military operation or terrorist attack should have a well-conceived political goal. Naji states that a study of politics of the enemy should dispel the notion that "religious motives" alone move the enemy to act. This statement implies that this notion was a common opinion among the young men al-Qaeda was recruiting during this period.

The recruitment videos and websites of al-Qaeda and their affiliates emphasize the romantic image of the tribal Arab warrior on horseback. In the previous chapter, Naji argued for the establishment of a new kind of tribalism based on mutually reinforcing bonds of faith-based loyalty. The author recommends that young men should study the sociology of the old tribal system that has been corrupted or destroyed by the modern world. With this recommendation Naji is signaling the importance of establishing a new transnational tribalism based on affiliation and pledges of loyalty to the top leadership of al-Qaeda. Naji states, "Our jihad is the jihad of a community, not the jihad of a movement." Part of the recruitment effort is to give disaffected urban youth something to belong to, a new kind of tribal affiliation. Naji's emphasis on educating these young men is to shape them into the operational mold and help them avoid the dangers of impetuosity or overconfidence.

Polarization: Drawing the People Into Battle

Naji has commented that the people of a Muslim country are basically unreliable from the jihadist perspective. No jihad should depend on them, at least in the beginning. Sooner or later, however, jihadists must rally most of the people around them if they are to be successful. Naji

refers to this attempt as “polarization”: drawing ordinary people into the camp of the jihadists by undermining the legitimacy of the central government. Any appeals for specific support rather than general sympathy are dangerous for clandestine organizations and the individuals or communities that support them. When leaders become engaged in active operations, history has shown that they make themselves vulnerable to being captured or killed, especially in heavily populated areas, where neighbors may decide to report suspicious individuals to the authorities. The list of second-tier operational al-Qaeda leaders who have been killed since 2001 is impressive. Jihadist strategists and historians regularly note the losses. As Naji explains, replenishing jihadist ranks is one of the goals of al-Qaeda’s strategy. The increasing technological capabilities of the United States are formidable, especially if local people become informants for local authorities, who then pass the intelligence along for targeting. When Naji was writing, the danger from informants was never far from the leaders, operators, and planners of al-Qaeda, perhaps even more than American technology, which was at the service of the Saudi government, to name just one example.

Naji claims that polarization working along the fault lines of contemporary Muslim society splits the population into three groups: those that join the jihadists, those that oppose them, and a third group that waits to see who wins the ensuing battle. It is this third faction, and in this point it is likely that Naji had Saudi Arabia’s uncommitted population in mind, “whose sympathy we should attract and bring about the desire for the victory of the people of faith; especially because this faction might have a decisive role in the last stages of the present battle.”⁸⁴

To achieve further polarization in this third group, Naji believes that more “operations” are called for to inflame opposition between the various groups so that people will join the jihadists or the opposition, as he says, the

“willing or unwilling.” Naji states that the battle must be very violent; in it, everyone must believe death is close. He assumes that, faced with death, most Muslims will be on the side that offers rewards in the afterlife rather than the side that offers death now and punishment in the afterlife.

Tribes represent a special opportunity. Naji judges that the power of the tribes will increase under conditions of anarchy despite the existence around them of gangs made up of the remnants of the old regime’s military. Naji uses the term “solidarity” (*asabiyyah*) to describe the strength of the tribes. This is the same term used by Ibn Khaldun to describe the social bonds of nomadic tribes in North Africa during the Middle Ages.⁸⁵ Naji does not want the tribes to give up this power; he wants to transform it into solidarity, based on faith, with the regions of administration of savagery. The tribal structures are strong in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the remote areas of Pakistan and Yemen but increasingly less prominent. The tribal system among Sunnis has broken down for the most part in Saudi Arabia, where the population in the cities is far from the tribal roots they claim. According to Naji, these urban centers are subject to the security system of central governments, which are apostate in the modern era.⁸⁶ The normal course of events in his thinking is migration from the desert regions to the cities. In a climate of general collapse in the central government, the tribes would grow stronger and become an asset to al-Qaeda, although this state of affairs would not occur spontaneously. Naji recognized that jihadist preachers would not be able to persuade Arab tribes to abandon their traditions of honor and kin-based solidarity, and thus the attempt would be counterproductive. Instead, Naji would transform the tribes into allies of the regions controlled by al-Qaeda, and if it would take a little money delivered into the hands of tribal leaders—well, that is not necessarily a problem.

The tribes are a great resource and a great problem in Yemen, just as they are in Afghanistan. It is the nature of tribes to be independent and resist manipulation from a central government. Naji's scheme hopes to avoid an invidious comparison to a traditional Middle Eastern central government by attempting to structure the result of a successful al-Qaeda jihad like a tribal federation. Al-Qaeda must learn to forgive less than perfect adherence to the strict Salafist program. With some grumbling, al-Qaeda learned to live with Pashtun tribesmen in Central and South Asia who do not abide by al-Qaeda's rigid concept of Salafist Islam. The same might need to be true for Yemen. Naji raises this necessity to the level of principle: "forgiveness." This kind of forgiveness, however, is pragmatic and based on a cost-benefit analysis. The Salafist jihadists forgive an "apostate" tribal chief if it will bring the new ummah some benefit without incurring much risk. Similarly, Naji cites the pragmatic principle of "uniting by money" (*al-talif b' al-mal*) to describe bribing tribal leaders and members to pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda. This practice is problematic, however, because the allegiance may turn out to be to money rather than to al-Qaeda. Nevertheless, Naji embraces this practice as part of "shari'ah politics," if only on a temporary basis.

THE FOURTH TOPIC: PROBLEMS WE WILL FACE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

In this topic, Naji returns to practical problems that he sees as obstacles to achieving his vision of complete success. It is as though the author wants to acknowledge and deal with the concerns of recruits and potential recruits. The solutions, however, have mostly been presented previously in his book. The problems are:

1. Decreased stock of believers (for jihad)
2. Shortage of administrative cadres
3. Loyalty to the old regime (especially with different Islamic orientations)

4. Infiltration and spies
5. Switch in loyalty of individuals, groups, or regions
6. Excessive zeal and its associated problems

The last problem seems to occur mostly in the first stage of jihad, during terrorist operations aimed at exhausting the central government of the targeted region. One example, according to Naji, is rushing operations. From what Naji has previously explained, we know that he believes drawing out a conflict as long as possible gives certain advantages to guerrillas like al-Qaeda's operatives, especially during the first stage of jihad, the purpose of which is "to drain the enemy." The problem is universal: young men want action, and leaders want action that leads to a certain political outcome. The problem is further complicated when leaders cannot adequately explain the reason for a delay to young terrorists because of the need for secrecy. This section gets at the heart of one of the purposes for Naji's book: to diminish random action and bring order and direction to operations. The way for al-Qaeda leaders to deal with the issue of zeal is to emphasize passages in the biographies of the prophet that demonstrate patience and obedience, the virtues that Naji is trying to instill in young fighters. Another way to deal with this issue, according to Naji, is for the leaders to choose operations that are well thought out and involve the young men in them. If leaders can do this regularly, the chances increase that young jihadists will not become discouraged or act on their own.

The zeal associated with heresy and foolishness is also introduced as a major problem. Heresy, according to Naji, is related to knowledge. To deal with this issue, the jihadists should have a cadre of religious scholars in every region of operations. Over the years, al-Qaeda has had difficulties in attracting respected religious scholars. This is an issue that al-Qaeda writers recognize, but the solution is difficult, especially when the religious

establishment is allied with the regime or vulnerable to pressure from the regime to refrain from overt acts of support for groups like al-Qaeda.

Foolish individuals seem the one problem for which there is no solution, and they therefore should not be allowed near operations. Naji relates an anecdote about this kind of person to illustrate what he means:

In another case, one of those was asked to read some papers and certain letters and then burn them, but he did not burn them but hid them well instead. Then when his house was searched during a random investigation, the papers were found. An affair was discovered, rather [I should say] a number of big affairs—the real thing this time! Whenever he was asked in prison “Why didn’t you burn the papers?” he said: “I could not bear to comply in burning papers that were in the handwriting of the shaykhs and the leadership.”⁸⁷

This kind of person cannot be helped and should be removed from the ranks of the jihadists during operations. Once jihad has proceeded to the stage of the administration of savagery, harmless work can be found for those who are liabilities during operations. Naji ends this chapter by warning that such individuals should not be allowed to get involved in anything sensitive even when jihadists are governing a region.

THE FIFTH INVESTIGATION AND CONCLUSION: DO EASIER SOLUTIONS EXIST?

One might expect the conclusion of Naji’s book to attack the United States or the local Muslim heads of state. Instead, the target seems to be the Muslim Brotherhood or groups influenced by the Brotherhood, although the author never names them. Such groups are looking for the easy way out, according to Naji. The gradualist arguments that Naji sets out to refute in his conclusion echo arguments he attacked earlier in this book. The approach of education, charity, and persuasion has been successful for the Muslim Brotherhood in many countries

in part because it is much easier to accept than the approach of skulls, severed limbs, and blood that Naji so often cites. Naji repeats his skepticism about the sincerity of any group that advocates preparation for jihad by founding institutions within the local governmental system, in the hopes that when the time is right the sons and grandsons will take up their Kalashnikovs and go to war in a sudden strike against that same system.

Naji argues that people who see violence as necessary before a true Islamic state can be established offer two approaches: either sudden, or after a long period of preparation and institution building. The first approach would be like a military coup and would be decisive, with very little loss of life, like the 1952 military coup in Egypt. Others argue for a sudden strike only after a long period of secret preparations. Naji dismisses this second solution as absurd because one cannot make preparations over a long period without being discovered.

According to Naji, an Islamic state cannot be founded on a military coup unless it is a part of a larger plan executed by the people of *tawhid* and *jihad* (monotheism and jihad). To strengthen his point, Naji quotes from the icon of jihad Abdullah Azzam:

Those who wait for a handful of military officers to establish Allah's religion on earth for them; those who issue orders to the people by way of the first broadcast announcement after the struggle is over in which there is no pain nor suffering, but was preceded by stages of secrecy, flattery, and suppression of the truth;—do they think that establishing societies and transforming souls, personalities, and hearts, building spirits and polishing them, are accomplished with such ease and cheap sacrifice?⁸⁸

Ayman al-Zawahiri had once thought that Egypt could be taken over by jihadists by means of a military coup.

He eventually rejected that approach, and now Naji is arguing that this approach is always hopeless. Instead, Naji emphasizes educating (that is, radicalizing) the people to mobilize them, much the way he believes the Afghan people were mobilized against the Soviet Union. This approach, however, raises a problem. On several occasions the author has pointed out that jihadists cannot rely on ordinary people, who will join wholeheartedly only after a territory is seized and governed by the jihadists. Even then their allegiance is suspect. Naji's and therefore al-Qaeda's strategy is caught in a dilemma: jihadists cannot trust the people to support them, but guerrilla forces need them to succeed. Nevertheless, in the conclusion of his book Naji emphasizes that transforming a people requires a great deal of sacrifice and struggle, especially if at the same time the religious establishment is telling those same people that violent jihad is not necessary or perhaps even wrong. Naji believes that extreme caution in the face of opposition is cowardice, and secrecy is a cloak for that cowardice and a recipe for doing nothing. Jihadists are activists and do not wait on others. Nevertheless, Naji and al-Qaeda have not solved the problem of gaining sustained support from ordinary people.

Naji closes his book as he began it, concluding that the way of al-Qaeda, which he calls "Salafist jihadism," is the best approach to jihad and to the situation in which Islam finds itself in the modern era. "We conclude from every chapter and investigation of [our] study that the Salafist jihadist movements are more advanced than any other [movement] in its understanding of the religion [*din*] of Allah Almighty—and in understanding the laws of shari'ah and universal laws."⁸⁹

Abu Bakr Naji reminds his readers that he is presenting the Salafist jihadist strategy in broad strokes and not tactical details. In his introduction, Naji told his readers that the enterprise plan and program of the Salafist jihadist movement, what Western scholars

sometimes refer to as “global jihad,” are superior to those of other Islamist movements.⁹⁰ Naji’s book, with the jihad in Saudi Arabia as a backdrop, has revealed the contours of the grand strategy within a study intended to instruct recruits, al-Qaeda veterans, and others about the big picture from a global perspective. The description of that strategy, which the author would have us believe was forged in the crucible of battle, has been revealed with repetitions and diversions to make wider points about al-Qaeda’s long-term strategy.

Five

The Jihadist Legacy of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri

Knowledge is the most important weapon of this age. The ignorant cannot lead this important struggle no matter how sincere and dedicated they are.

—Abu Mus'ab al Suri, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*

WHO IS ABU MUS'AB AL-SURI?

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri is a well-known if mysterious personality who worked within jihadist circles for at least twenty-five years before his arrest by Pakistani authorities in Quetta, Pakistan, in 2005. On November 18, 2004, the U.S. Department of State announced a \$5 million reward for al-Suri. The text gives a brief and inadequate description of his activities: "Mustafa Setmariam Nasar, also known as Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, is an al-Qaida member and former trainer at the Derunta and al-Ghuraba terrorist camps in Afghanistan where he trained terrorists in poisons and chemicals. Nasar is a Syrian with dual Spanish Nationality."¹

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri took great pains to document his history and the world of jihad, which he witnessed firsthand. He insisted that practical experience was a necessary precursor to strategic thought, even though he was fascinated by history and rated books above people in framing his ideas. Although we know a great deal about al-Suri's life, he still remains a mystery. For example, he is an idealist who loves books, history, music, and his Spanish wife; he is also a man who would like to see a nuclear device explode in New York City and would exult at the deaths of the ordinary people who

live there.² At the same time, he cautions against operations in the United States that would slaughter innocent people.³ The book that we will examine most carefully is *Da‘wah al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah al-Alamiyyah* (*The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*).⁴ This book, his magnum opus, was completed late in 2004. Al-Suri intended it to be his legacy to share with jihadists who would follow his experiences and analysis of actual jihad and his strategy for success.

Al-Suri is as important today for understanding al-Qaeda and global jihad as he was before his capture and subsequent disappearance. He trained large numbers of jihadists over decades in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and North Africa. Furthermore, he taught a version of what American officials and others refer to as “self-radicalization” or “homegrown” terrorism some fifteen years before his capture. Based on the accounts of intelligence analysts in several European countries and Spanish court documents, his biographer Brynjar Lia has pointed out, “Some of his writings have been found on computers belonging to suspected jihadi terrorists in Europe, including the Madrid Cell. Furthermore, audio or video recordings of his lectures were among items discovered in jihadi cells in Syria, Jordan, Italy, Germany, the United States and elsewhere.”⁵ As we shall discuss below, some attempted terrorist attacks in the United States appear to be foreshadowed in what al-Suri describes as individual and independent-unit terrorism. Attacks based on his model have also been carried out in Bali, Casablanca, Istanbul, Madrid, and London.⁶ While Naji saw such operations primarily as a way to make the West “pay the price” for military actions against jihadists, al-Suri saw them also as the best way to unite the Muslim community and defeat the United States.

Al-Suri did not always admit to being a member of al-Qaeda, but he expressed great respect for its leaders. For example, he tells readers that both Osama Bin Laden and Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri were not only his brothers but also his friends. While al-Suri refers to

Osama Bin Laden as the “Shaykh of Jihadists,” he refers to Ayman al-Zawahiri as “my Shaykh,” which seems to indicate a closer relationship.⁷

Over the years, Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri used many names in a number of languages. His given name is most likely Mustafa bin Abd al-Qadir Sitt Maryam Nasar. In addition to his best-known alias, Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri, his most used nom de plume is Umar Abd al-Hakim, with which he signed his first book about the Islamic uprising in Syria in the 1980s and which appears with other aliases and his given name at the end of his longest book in 2004. In American sources, al-Suri is sometimes referred to as Mustafa Setmariam Nasar. I will refer to him as Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri or, for the sake of brevity, as al-Suri.⁸

The Arabic-language biographical piece at the heading of a prominent jihadist website library of al-Suri’s books states that “he was born in the city of Aleppo in 1378 h. [1958 c.e.] and studied mechanical engineering in its college.” The biographical sketch then goes through the main points of his career.⁹ Suri himself gives a similar outline of his activities in *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*:

Through [continuous] participation in the field during this crucial period in the modern Jihadist current, I lived the Jihadist experience in Syria in the field from 1980. I was a member of the military leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood during the events of Hama in 1982. I also experienced the Afghan Arab jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and Communism also in the field from 1988 to 1992. Then, I participated in the sad and bitter experience of jihad in Algeria close up through my media work with the Algerian *Ansar al-Jihad* in London (1993–1997), until we were forced to leave because the leadership was taken over by deviators. I explained [this] in my book: *My Testimony Concerning the Jihad in Algeria, 1989–1996*. I then took to the field for the last

Jihadist experiences, the most important of which was in the last decade with the Taliban and the Afghan Arabs in Afghanistan (1996–2001).¹⁰

JIHAD IN SYRIA: THE MAKING OF A REVOLUTIONARY

Syria had been a hotbed of political currents and contradictions from the end of World War II until the cataclysmic end of the Islamic insurrection in the 1980s. The Muslim Brotherhood had grown in strength at the same time that the power of the Syrian branch of the Baath party gained power at the height of Arab nationalism. When the young Hafiz al-Asad assumed power in 1970, his authoritarian government set off a series of events that brought the simmering Muslim Brotherhood revolt to a boil. Asad's government represented everything that the Brotherhood opposed. The government lived by secular Baathist principles, including separation of religion and state, and espoused socialist ideology. Many early Levantine Baathists were Christians. Many of the Sunni groups and certainly the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria resented the fact that they were ruled by the head of a fringe Shi'ah sect, the Alawis, that many Sunnis did not consider to be Muslims. Al-Suri refers to this sect using the pejorative term "Nusayris," characterizing them as infidels (*kuffar*).¹¹

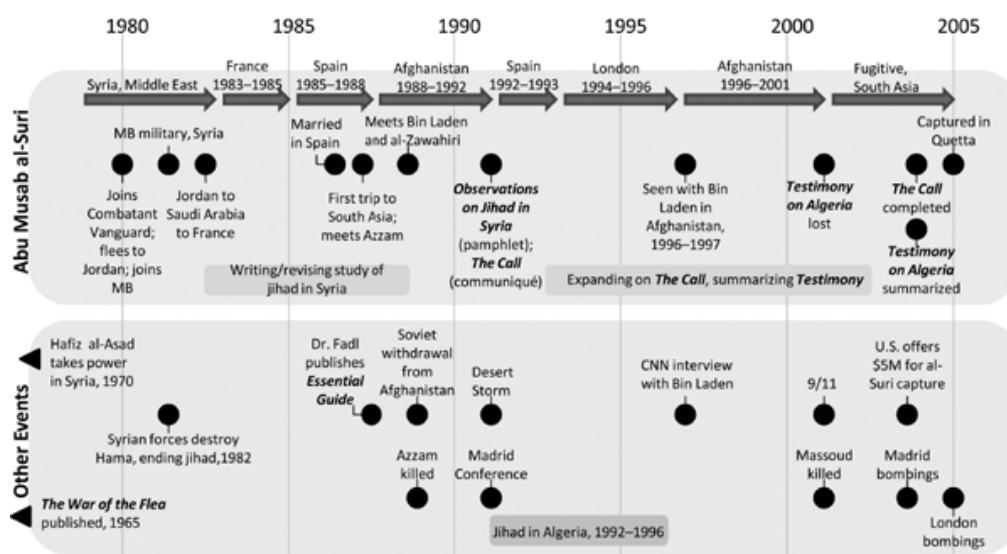


Figure 5.1 Timeline: Al-Suri and Global Jihad

On June 11, 1980, al-Suri joined al-Tali'ah al-Muqatilah (The Combatant Vanguard), a radical organization that engaged in most of the fighting against the Syrian regime. The Vanguard had broken off in all but name from the main body of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria,¹² echoing the course of various radical groups that split off from the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, the mother organization. I use the terms "radical" and "extremist" to describe groups that resemble al-Qaeda in that they refuse to negotiate or compromise with those they have chosen as enemies and quickly turn against those who will. Some extremist groups in Egypt and Algeria were so unforgiving of compromise and so indiscriminate in their violence that even al-Qaeda refers to them as "deviants." Al-Suri sometimes refers to these groups as *takfiris*, or those who call other Muslims infidels.¹³ Because of the Vanguard's activities, al-Suri was forced to flee to Jordan in late 1980, where he joined the Muslim Brotherhood proper for the first time to gain the support of the larger organization to continue his jihad in exile.

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri must have risen to the military leadership rather quickly and seems to have been groomed for it, receiving military training in Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan. One can see Arab governments using the dangerous, volatile elements of Islamic extremism against their enemies even though these same elements could one day turn against them. Al-Suri was trained in the Egypt of Anwar Sadat in early 1981, not long before Sadat's assassination at the hands of a domestic offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Largely seen in the West as a wise leader who was willing to compromise for peace with Israel, Sadat did not fully appreciate the danger inherent in supporting people who will not compromise and who violently oppose those who will.¹⁴ The government of Saddam Hussein, which was at war with revolutionary Shi'ah Iran, had no problem helping those who would fight the forces of a country that was supporting its enemy's war effort. Jordan considered Syria an existential threat. The Jordanian government

surely knew that the ideology of some of these radicals considered Jordan as much a part of their vision of Syria as Lebanon or Israel. Countries have multiple motives for intelligence operations, but Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq certainly must have used this support at least to penetrate these groups and learn about their methods and intentions. Whatever their motives, all these Sunni governments were willing to use religious extremists against the Shi'ah government of Syria, which ruled with an iron fist over its majority Sunni population.

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri became disillusioned with the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria and resigned from the organization in 1982 because of their role in the failed jihad in Syria. His views concerning the Muslim Brotherhood resemble those of al-Qaeda, best represented by Ayman al-Zawahiri's polemical book *Al-Hisad al-Murr (The Bitter Harvest)*, covering sixty years of the history of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁵ Al-Suri's book *The Islamic Jihadist Revolution in Syria*, a work of almost one thousand pages, covering lessons learned from the insurrection in Syria, catapulted al-Suri from the terrorist ranks into one of the foremost strategists and historians of the global jihadist movement. These two books suggest a natural affinity between the two men, which revealed itself when they finally met in the late 1980s. Both were ideologically aligned before they ever met; both belonged to extremist offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood; both plotted jihadist insurrection in their native countries, which failed; both moved on to what we now refer to as "global jihad," with America as the immediate target necessary to destroy "apostate" regimes in the Middle East; like Osama Bin Laden, both men saw the world created by the Sykes-Picot agreement as illegitimate and the borders and states confirmed by it as meaningless; both men opposed the separation of church and state; and both rejected the view that Islam is a personal religion rather than a political system governing all.¹⁶ We have remarked previously that al-Zawahiri's thinking had a profound effect on al-Qaeda's strategists. The same is true for al-

Suri, although he probably influenced al-Zawahiri in return and considered him a friend as well as a revered figure.

In his pamphlet “Observations on the Jihadist Experience in Syria,” taken from his longer book on Syria, Al-Suri captured the need for a strategic approach to jihad.¹⁷ He details lessons learned from every aspect of the Syrian insurrection, but his overarching message is that jihad will fail if it is not treated as a form of guerrilla warfare based on classic communist strategic thinking about insurrection, minus communist ideology. Both the topography and demography of the target country must be studied. Revolutionaries need to operate within the target country and rely on themselves. They must have a detailed plan that benefits from both study of the target country and lessons learned from other Muslim and non-Muslim guerrilla wars. Jihadists must be close to the people and unite them under a well-conceived ideology and political concept. The Syrian jihad had none of these requirements for success. The kind of jihad al-Suri has in mind is revolutionary war in terms familiar to Che Guevara and Mao. Al-Suri is blunt in his criticism but somewhat subtle in identifying the source of his wisdom about guerrilla warfare, except to note that it came from his own training. There is a clue to his intellectual orientation in the preface of the first edition of his longer history of the Syrian revolution. In the fourth line of the preface, al-Suri dedicates his work to the *mustad’afina*, which can be translated as those “deemed to be weak” or “oppressed.” Perhaps by coincidence, the translation of Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea*, a book al-Suri taught for years and that many al-Qaeda strategists cite, was rendered in Arabic as *Harb al-Mustad’afina*.

Al-Suri’s strategic approach to jihad developed from his observations of Syria, leavened with further bitter experiences and additional harsh lessons about insurgency. By writing his book he discovered that he was able to influence his future comrades as well. These

and other lessons articulated by al-Suri had a role to play in Naji's thinking and that of the leadership of al-Qaeda concerning the best approaches to insurrections in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and elsewhere.¹⁸ In al-Suri's view, the most important failure in Syria was the lack of a strategy and comprehensive planning before the insurrection was engaged. We learned from Naji that at least three years prior to 9/11 comprehensive country studies were undertaken, some of which were likely of the type al-Suri recommends. Naji refers his reader to al-Suri's works for "studies"—and while we can only speculate, it seems more than likely that these studies included al-Suri's works on Central Asia and Yemen as well as his lessons learned from experience in Syria and Algeria.¹⁹

AL-SURI ENTERS THE GLOBAL SCENE

Al-Suri left Jordan in 1983 after resigning from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. After a failed attempt to study at a university in Saudi Arabia, he moved to France at the invitation of some relatives.²⁰ He had not given up on the jihad in Syria, however, and he traveled to Turkey later in 1983 and possibly 1984 with the apparent intention of entering Syria to engage in clandestine operations. Nothing came of these plans except to keep al-Suri engaged with international jihadist networks. He returned to France, where he stayed on and off until he traveled to Spain in 1985, probably to escape the interest of French authorities in his activities.

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri spent most of his time between 1985 and 1988 in Spain, traveling to South Asia for the first time in 1987 with a revised version of his study on the Syrian jihad, which he was to distribute to other jihadists for comment. In Peshawar, he met with the most famous icon of classic jihad at the time, Abdullah Azzam.²¹ Al-Suri approached Azzam about the possibility of renewed jihad in Syria. Azzam did not support jihadist attacks against Muslim leaders and regimes, focusing instead on the defense of Muslim territories from non-Muslim invasion or occupation. He had devoted time to the jihad in Afghanistan and had little time for the Syrian

revolt even when it was fully engaged. He apparently saw little merit in pursuing a jihad in Syria in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, al-Suri's respect for Azzam's accomplishments and writings did not diminish, and al-Suri continued to recommend Azzam's books on jihad for the rest of his active life to all who would engage in jihad. With Azzam's encouragement, Al-Suri became a trainer in Pakistan and in camps in Afghanistan. He trained Egyptians and many other nationalities in the arts of guerilla warfare and on the bigger picture, the need for strategy and advanced planning based on lessons learned in the field.

The year 1988 in Pakistan witnessed the publication of one of the most significant books on jihad for the modern era. Just as the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was winding down and the motivating force for the classic jihad espoused by Azzam was losing its power, the new jihad began. The book was *Al-Umda fi l'dad al-Iddah li al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah (The Pillar for Preparation of the Many for Jihad on the Path of Allah)*. Another Egyptian physician, Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, known as Dr. Fadl, wrote it to provide religious justification for the new concept of violent jihad.²² Along with Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Sharif had attracted other Egyptians belonging to the extremist organization Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), which sought to ensure that their ideas became the controlling influence in the coming jihad. As part of this effort, they were banding together to influence and control access to the son of a Saudi billionaire, Osama Bin Laden, at the time of the foundation of al-Qaeda.

Al-Suri was drawn into the orbit of Ayman al-Zawahiri and the other Egyptians around Bin Laden at the time. Soviet forces began withdrawing from Afghanistan in May 1988 and completed their move on February 15, 1989, when the last troops moved across the border to Uzbekistan. The battle for the Afghanistan of every jihadist's dream was still not over; a new phase had now begun, one that pitted Muslims against Muslims. In this

atmosphere, an unknown hand killed Abdullah Azzam, the greatest hero of jihad at the time, on November 24, 1989. Whoever was responsible for the assassination, Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Egyptian faction around Bin Laden were now left with a clear field to develop their new concept of global jihad, with which Azzam had disagreed.²³

Abdullah Azzam was a towering figure in the history of modern jihad already in 1989, and he remains so today. What could have made him enemies within the jihadist groups in Peshawar and with al-Zawahiri? With the Soviet forces gone, the various jihadist factions engaged in a civil war to determine who would lead Islamic Afghanistan. Perhaps “civil war” is too tidy a term to describe the free-for-all in which tribes and foreign fighters engaged for primacy in whatever state would emerge. Two contenders at the time al-Suri arrived in the area were the Afghan tribal leaders Ahmad Shah Massoud for the Tajiks and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar for the Pashtun.²⁴ Steve Coll has pointed out: “The dominant view among Pakistani generals, whether they were Islamists or secularists, was that Hekmatyar offered the best hope for a pro-Pakistan government in Kabul.”²⁵ By 1989, Abdullah Azzam had drawn closer to Ahmad Shah Massoud, while Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were associated with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Al-Qaeda arranged for the assassination of Massoud on September 9, 2011. As al-Suri notes in one of his letters from a later period, eventually the Pakistanis in favor of the Taliban abandoned the bloody-handed Gulbuddin Hekmatyar: “I found that people came from the Sudan and everywhere and began fighting alongside the Taliban movement, which for Pakistan was a substitute for Hekmatyar. Everyone, even children in the streets knew that they [the Taliban] were created and controlled by Pakistan.”²⁶

The Afghan leaders were motivated both by personal ambition and by the promise of winning the greatest advantage for their respective followers in a post-Soviet

Afghanistan. The Arabs' concern was focused on whose vision of the future of jihad would prevail. The Palestinian Azzam wanted to establish a "firm base" from which to defend Muslim lands from foreign domination. Azzam was different from either Bin Laden or al-Zawahiri and most of the other noted members of al-Qaeda, who often had technical educations. Azzam received a religious education and obtained a PhD in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence from Al-Azhar. He was pan-Islamic in outlook and did not agree with the divisive opinions of the Egyptian faction that had attached itself to Osama Bin Laden in the late 1980s. He was by no means a moderate, however, when the subject turned to non-Muslim presence on what he considered traditionally Muslim lands. He was known for his slogan: "Jihad and the rifle alone: no negotiations, no conferences, and no dialogues."²⁷

The Egyptians were full of ideas at the time, but they lacked adequate funding to act on them. Osama Bin Laden had money and a quiet charisma that appealed to would-be jihadists and those who would fund them. The personal problems between Dr. Fadl and al-Zawahiri were evident even in this period, but they were still comrades in arms and ideological soulmates. The Egyptians were developing a new approach to jihad that we now refer to as "global jihad." One of the hallmarks of the new approach was opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, rejection of the modern state structure in the Middle East, a willingness to overthrow standing Muslim governments, and growing animosity toward the United States. Although they did not consider themselves *takfiris* (those proclaiming individual Muslims and groups as infidels), the Egyptians did not hesitate to label Muslim leaders and their governments as apostates and thus legitimate targets for killing. By this time, Azzam and Bin Laden had grown apart and become rivals. Nevertheless, Bin Laden was not in any sense under the Egyptians' control, but the longer he and al-Zawahiri spent together the closer their ideas

became. Bin Laden left Pakistan two weeks before Azzam's assassination. Al-Suri stayed in South Asia.

The Egyptians' experiences must have added to al-Suri's own insights and opinions about the conduct of jihad. Al-Suri had already developed the basic concepts that ultimately found their way into his final long book and legacy to the next generation of jihadists. At the same time, he must still have learned a great deal from such famous theorists and practitioners of jihad as Sayyid Imam al-Sharif (Dr. Fadl) and Abdullah Azzam. Brynjar Lia points out that both Dr. Fadl and Azzam offered to review al-Suri's writings. Among these was his book on Syria and likely the forty-page communiqué that was to form the basis of al-Suri's *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*,²⁸ in which he describes the "heart of the book": "And it is the primary concept of the *Call to Resistance*, which I wrote first as a communiqué in the latter part of 1990 and published it in the beginning of 1991. Because of its substance (*jawhar*) I returned to Afghanistan during the time of the Taliban and undertook a heroic attempt to transform it into a living plan, which would move across the earth."²⁹

Slightly more than one year after Azzam's death, al-Suri's thought had diverged from the older man's vision of classic jihad toward what was to become global jihad or, in al-Suri's terms, "global resistance." As noted above, al-Suri must have learned a great deal from Azzam, who was not only a recognized scholar of Islamic law but also had extensive field experience, which al-Suri tended to respect more than any other accomplishment. It is likely that if Azzam had lived to see American forces lodged in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War, fighting the Americans would have been totally consonant with his principles. Although al-Suri claimed that Azzam supported global jihad in the sense that the term has come to mean today, the claim is likely al-Suri's attempt to associate his own thought with an icon of jihad. Azzam opposed jihad against Muslim rulers and was known to ridicule revolutionary jihadists.³⁰ In his final

book, however, al-Suri recommends that would-be jihadists read the works of Azzam as the best intellectual preparation for jihad.³¹

Dr. Fadl was a surgeon who treated wounded jihadists when they returned from the front and an autodidact in Islamic law. He had a great deal of religious knowledge to impart but nothing of practical military or strategic value to share with the young man. Al-Suri became close to al-Zawahiri, who again could offer strategic, historic, and organizational advice, but Zawahiri is not a soldier. So we can conclude that al-Suri was telling the truth when he claimed that he learned more from books than from men. Sometime between 1989 and 1991, al-Suri received a B.A. in history by correspondence course with Beirut University's branch in Amman.³²

Al-Suri was not just a theorist of jihad; he was a practitioner as well. He evidently excelled in his military training in Baghdad and in Jordanian safe houses. His technical turn of mind and engineering training made him adept at bomb making. He taught courses in explosives engineering and urban guerrilla warfare in Jordan and possibly Iraq. With one of his students he also wrote a small manual (*The Syrian Memorandum*) containing course material on explosives engineering.³³ Al-Suri later told a Kuwaiti newspaper that this manual was used in training camps in Afghanistan. He was no doubt credible and impressive as a trainer, although tapes of his lessons reveal a dry, rapid-fire delivery in a passionless voice punctuated by the question "understand?" (*fahim?*).³⁴ He was athletic and austere by nature. Others must have respected him, even if they disagreed with some of his ideas or found his critical nature hard to endure at times.

THE TWO EARTHQUAKES: THE ARRIVAL OF AMERICAN TROOPS AND A PEACE CONFERENCE

Many who traveled to Afghanistan to join in the jihad did so without realizing the full implications of their actions. It

was a confusing period that saw the gestation of many new concepts. In his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, al-Suri describes the situation at the time and the great event that galvanized everyone's thoughts and fixed their attention:

The gathering of Arab mujahedeen between 1987 and 1992 in Afghanistan and in the regions bordering Pakistan, especially their capital Peshawar, reached its peak in 1990. [The gathering] encompassed without a doubt the full spectrum of the Islamic Awakening, especially the various Arab schools. This gathering witnessed what may be described as an intellectual and spiritual earthquake, especially at the level of the Arab mujahedeen. That [earthquake] was the arrival in the Arabian Peninsula of the forces of the international alliance under American leadership and under the guise of what was called liberating Kuwait. This was clearly a fragile disguise for the new arrogant Crusader campaigns—led by America, Western Europe, and the Jews against the center of the Abode of Islam in the Levant, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula. That earthquake shook the entire Islamic and Arab ummah.³⁵

When al-Suri uses the Arabic word for the Levant, al-Sham, he means the land that encompasses present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and the Sinai, as he explains in his book about the Syrian jihadist revolution. Using the classical term al-Sham avoids using the commonly accepted names of the countries al-Suri and other al-Qaeda members and fellow travelers from Bin Laden down would see as the illegitimate consequences of the Sykes-Picot agreement. From al-Suri's perspective, the arrival of Western troops in Saudi Arabia is just the next stage of the Western design to take over the Muslim heartland and steal their resources. Thus he sees the liberation of Kuwait as a cover for the plan that began

with the secularist overthrow of the Turkish caliphate and the Sykes-Picot agreement in the aftermath of World War I. This “Crusader-Zionist” plan, in al-Suri’s view, continued with the establishment of the state of Israel after World War II and the installation of tyrannical local regimes in Muslim lands and would culminate with American troops dominating the region. It might be difficult for a person with a secular perspective to accept that a highly intelligent man could actually believe this, but it nevertheless fits comfortably with al-Suri’s and other jihadists’ worldview. In February 2003, for example, Osama Bin Laden issued a communiqué that reflects the thinking of all of the strategists we have been discussing and in which he mentions Sykes-Picot:

As I speak, our wounds have yet to heal from the Crusader wars of the last century against the Islamic world, or from the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 between France and Britain, which brought about the dissection of the Islamic world into fragments. The Crusaders’ agents are still in power to this day, in light of a new Sykes-Picot agreement, the Bush-Blair axis, which has the same banner and objective, namely the banner of the Cross and the objective of destroying and looting of our beloved Prophet’s ummah.³⁶

Al-Suri notes that a number of Muslim states participated in Desert Storm along with the Western powers. In this description, the reader can see echoes of Abu Bakr Naji, who paints a picture of a world order in which America maintains its regional hegemony through local proxies. To al-Suri, American foreign policy is the continuation of the British and French policies of previous centuries.

Abu Mus’ab al-Suri mentions a second earthquake, referring to the Madrid conference in October 1991 and its run-up. He considered the participation of Arab countries in a conference aspiring to Middle East peace as a betrayal of Palestinians, a political earthquake in which an important part of the Muslim ummah was involved. This second earthquake added impetus to the

first to move al-Suri toward what we know today as global jihad. Brynjar Lia tells us: “Sometime in mid-1990, al-Suri went back to Spain for a longer visit, returning only in 1991. It was during these months that he devoted himself to writing about how the jihad movement should be restructured successfully to face the growing threats from the New World Order.”³⁷

Al-Suri was stung by the fact that Saudi Arabia had convened a conference of religious scholars to obtain a religious opinion, which argued that Islam permitted asking for American military help to repulse the Iraqis. Moreover, these religious leaders asserted that attacking allied soldiers in the region was a punishable offence under Islamic law. Al-Suri began to see the “apostate” regimes and their allied religious authorities as part of the New World Order, whose purpose, he claimed, is to destroy Islam as a culture and as a society. Al-Suri portrays the New World Order in his *Call* as the jihadists’ worst nightmare.

Years later, writing after the United States had, in his view, destroyed or disrupted jihadist organizations worldwide in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, al-Suri looks back to Desert Storm and sees the beginning of America’s plan. Like Naji, after being routed out of Afghanistan, he felt that the movement had been weakened almost to the point that they could not mount a meaningful defense. Al-Suri claims the Americans had mobilized their own forces, along with Europe, Israel, and the apostate Muslim leaders and their in-house religious leaders, all against the armed jihadist movement. As he tells the story, he left South Asia and returned to Spain, where he wrote his communiqué containing his new thoughts about jihad. When he returned to Peshawar in 1991, however, he had a difficult time finding anyone to publish this dangerous work. Instead, al-Suri and four friends published one thousand copies and distributed it to jihadists.

In his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, al-Suri confirms that the basic ideas for his magnum opus

occurred to him before he returned to Spain in 1990 or 1991, while he was in the company of Arabs who had come to Afghanistan during this period.³⁸ They shared with him their thoughts, experiences, and what they had learned from their own investigations. He summarizes his views in six points, in which his rage is apparent:

1. “The Desert Storm war was the beginning of the transformation established by the creation of the New World Order. This invasion revealed the real enemy that was hidden behind our governments. They are the international Crusaders and their vanguard the NATO states and behind them Israel. [The invasion] made them the clear, real, and most critical enemy to confront. It clarified as well that continuing to engage in battles and limited, regional Jihadist confrontations (no matter how legitimate) would not bring about victory—but Allah knows best! ...”

2. “The existing, international war and the system of globalization of everything—including the coming confrontation between the Muslims and their enemies, which have come out of hiding into the public—requires a system of global confrontation on our part, global in thinking, methods, and confrontation that did not exist at that time [1991].”

3. “The counterterrorism regime began, which America and Europe proposed through a series of security conferences following the Madrid Conference in the beginning of 1991. They made it clear that the security confrontations with Jihadist movements and Islamic fundamentalists was moving into an international phase after I had witnessed the evolution from country-specific to a regionwide approach. They [America and Europe] also made it clear that this would lead to aborting all the operational methods of the Jihadists: movements, finance, communications, activity and methods of organization—because Jihadists depend on movement throughout the world after being hunted in their own countries.”

4. “The official religious establishment and a large part of the religious scholars and their religious institutions are prepared to become part of the New World Order automatically and in the clearest sense, part of the enemy. After having formally chosen to ride in the same boat as their infidel regimes, they are working within the new Jewish-Crusader campaign to the point that these religious bodies would undertake any legal or intellectual abortion of any plan of Jihadist resistance.”

5. “The other schools of Islamic political awakening and especially the political parties (with their middle of the road positions) through their investigation into participating in parliament and government (with arrogant ignorance representing apostate regimes!) will explain away all that because they are part of the international system, and part of the enemy (whether they want to be or not) under the cover of ‘gradualism’ and of slogans that would not convince dumb beasts of their usefulness or justification—neither legal nor political—especially after the blows ‘Islamic Democracy’ received in Algeria, Turkey, Tunisia, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and other places. And they will stand with their governments against the mujahedeen, these (Islamic!) parties that have become part of the constitutional establishment (Shari‘ah!).”

6. “I believed that the remaining Jihadist organizations and their fragments like those coming from Egypt or the Levant or elsewhere—whether they are established or beginning to build themselves like most groups and Jihadist reinforcements coming from North Africa—[all] were establishing themselves on a very backward foundation relative to battlefield developments and would be consumed in the flames of the new security measures of the war on terrorism, but Allah knows best!”³⁹

According to jihadist lore, the United States controls the flow of money, the most powerful media in the world, almost all local government leaders, and the technology to track and destroy their enemies. Al-Suri’s chronology

is somewhat confused, perhaps because many years had passed between the time when he first conceived of his new approach to jihad and the period after 9/11 when he was writing his final draft, on the run from safe house to safe house. He appears to have come to the conclusions expressed above while in Afghanistan and Peshawar, and then he traveled to Spain, where he wrote a forty-page pamphlet based on these points. He then returned to Peshawar, intending to circulate his pamphlet among experienced jihadists to hear their views and persuade them that all jihadists had to regroup according to his new strategy. Clearly, he sees this pamphlet, which he refers to as a communiqué, as an important basis for his final book—a basis so important that he summarizes it in his magnum opus. The crux of the ideas in this communiqué was as follows:

- “Exposing the condition and situation of Muslims particularly during the Gulf War (Desert Storm)”
- “Rebutting the claims of the legitimacy of the invasion of the Crusaders into the heart of the Abode of the Muslims”
- “Calling for jihad [because of] this campaign”
- “Rebutting the claim that Saddam Hussein represented a hope of confronting the Crusaders”
- “Proving that the Jihadist forces and organizations or rather the forces of the [entire] Islamic Awakening are not enough to confront this global Jewish-Crusader campaign. Instead, it is necessary to return the entire ummah to jihad, breathe life into it, and marry it to a global Islamic resistance against the global Crusader-Jewish attack.”
- “Proving that the call to the ummah as a whole must be based on the ordinary understanding of Islam and an emotional call to jihad and not on the basis of the creedal, intellectual, and tangled

legalistic jihadist details, although they are no doubt generally correct”

- “Choosing a key struggle and call to jihad to unite all Islamic orientations of the Awakening and all segments and classes of Muslims from the humblest to the highest who will share the same level of understanding; therefore, the call to liberate the holy places is chosen as a slogan for the call to resistance to save Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem from the Jews and Crusaders—and a slogan that calls for jihad against the external enemy instead of jihad against the [local] rulers (a jihad that the people do not support, thanks to the good services of the heroic Sunni religious scholars)”
- “Choosing jihad against the Jews led by Israel, the Christians led by America, and the European states of NATO as the external aggressor enemy to be the basis for this call [to jihad]”
- “Showing the importance of the economic dimension of jihad, i.e., the Muslim treasury and wealth, especially petroleum, which has already been pillaged and of which this campaign will pillage the rest.”
- “Giving this type of economic jihad its shari‘ah dimension that is missing from the jihadist intellectual platform and will continue to be missing because some emerging young jurists of jihad consider it a violation of a good-faith contract!”⁴⁰

Al-Suri summarizes three dimensions of the call to jihad that he is proposing in the post–Desert Storm era, in which he sees the entire world arrayed against the Salafist jihadist current. The call is designed to appeal to ordinary people, not extremists, although al-Suri does not frame the issue quite this way. He claims that the only way to deal with the situation in the Arabian Peninsula and its environs in 1991 is to return to classic

jihād and use themes that will appeal to ordinary people. In essence he is asking his jihadist brothers to loosen the bonds of strict Salafism and technical discussions of global jihād to allow more people to embrace the proposed jihād. He is consciously returning to Azzam's preference for fighting the "invaders" of Muslim lands rather than attacking local rulers. In his view, the key to the peoples' heart has three dimensions:

1. The religious dimension: the holy places of Islam
2. The political dimension: foreign occupation
3. The economic dimension: petroleum

Al-Suri then transitions to the operational dimension, which is the real innovation in his strategy and probably the reason he was unable to persuade fellow jihadists to follow his lead. In effect, he tells al-Qaeda and similar global jihadist groups to disband as hierarchical organizations. It is a call to an approach superficially similar to what Marc Sageman will later term "leaderless jihād" and what numerous commentators and officials call "homegrown" terrorism.⁴¹ To emphasize the importance of this key point, those who published the PDF online version of al-Suri's *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* set it in bold text:

Calling young men and Muslims in general to practice individual resistance so that resistance does not depend on a structure and net-worked pyramidal organizations [in which] the arrest of some individuals leads to the destruction of the [entire network] and the arrest of all its members; and choosing a style of operation (system of operation) not an organization in the generally understood sense [of the term]. In this way each participant in resistance operations (in which all Muslims participate) may be traced to one thing called "the global Islamic resistance" where the action of the whole maximizes the benefit [of individual operations]. Moreover, the arrest of individuals does not result in the arrest of all

because there is no connection among them. This is the core of the strategic military concept.⁴²

The outline of al-Suri's concept seems simple. Security forces have consistently rolled up jihadist networks because of the connection of cells to the center; the new approach breaks the link between the center and the cells, and the cells, moreover, have no connection to one another. At the same time, we have to ask how disjointed terrorist cells can be effective. It is difficult to see how isolated terrorist attacks can have a collective effect other than to remove a clear target for the international security system set up through the cooperation of the United States and its allies. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri continues the list of bullets that summarize his forty-page pamphlet, envisaging a central unit that provides inspiration, analysis, and propaganda to unite isolated jihadist cells throughout the world. It is not difficult to understand how the jihadists of 1991 might have found this approach difficult to swallow. When al-Suri wrote about his concept in greater detail in 2004, the Internet was beginning to show its true power, and readers might have been able to see how a disconnected network could function, at least in terms of communications. It does seem to reflect how some of al-Qaeda's leaders have been functioning since al-Suri's capture. His summary of the 1991 pamphlet continues with the rest of his essential points:

- "Defining the enemy targets that must be hit: all forms of enemy presence, first in our countries, second in countries around the world, and third in the center of their homeland but especially an enemy presence in our countries that is political, military, missionary, economic, cultural, and tourist, particularly Jews then America, Britain, Russia, and then all NATO countries, and finally any country that stands with them against Islam and Muslims"

- “Summarizing the shari‘ah proof that these countries’ wealth, blood, all manner of citizens and interests are legal [targets]—presenting it with a collection of the fatwas of Ahmad Shakir (may Allah have mercy on him)”⁴³

- “Charging Jihadist organizations and individual Muslims who have previously received military training and combat experience to start the wheel of resistance rolling; and calling the general public to the methods of civil resistance from paramilitary operations to religious and political propaganda operations, preparing speeches and pamphlets and slogans so that all segments of the ummah participate in this jihad; and this means open resistance in the form of a general Intifada”

- “Calling on the resistance mujahedeen to form up small detachments that will finance themselves from the plundered funds of the enemy; and calling on wealthy Muslims to finance and support the families of the fighters”

- “Calling operational Jihadists to resistance that targets the foreign enemy in our countries as fundamental as well as in their [own] countries; additionally calling them to target important apostate rulers of Muslims and their top tier of supporters because they are the basis of [the rulers’] sup-port—but without transforming confrontations with the governments into open revolution, as happened in previous experiences; moreover, attacking the armed forces and local security only to defend against being killed or captured—[instead of attacking them] persuade these forces to participate in the resistance in their ranks as part of the forces of the ummah”

- “Exposing the hypocritical religious scholars and the icons of the Islamist movements that became loyal followers of the New World Order and then calling on Muslims to abandon them and embrace the scholars of the Jihadists—then call this rare type of scholar to lead the popular resistance in all Muslim countries”⁴⁴

Not only did al-Suri fail to convince al-Qaeda's leaders of the need for a radically new strategy; he also concluded that the gap between the reality of the ummah in 1991 and his desired outcome was so great that it could not be breached for some time to come. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri left the front in South Asia for Madrid. In 1991, he concentrated on what he called "stage 2" of his life's work, the *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* (begun in earnest in 1990 and fully completed only in 2004). The book in its present form began to take shape only in 2002, when al-Suri was forced into isolation after leaving Afghanistan for the last time. I shall return to the "heart" of the book after tracing his steps to his next bitter historical lesson in jihad. The lesson he learned was about Algeria, but he learned it in London.

THE INTERLUDE IN EUROPE AND THE BITTER EXPERIENCE OF ALGERIA

In his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, al-Suri is vague about when he returned to Madrid from South Asia. In any case, he left sometime after his effort to convince his fellow jihadists that his new strategy was the only way to defeat the American juggernaut. Bin Laden had returned to Peshawar from Saudi Arabia at the beginning of 1991 and then left for Sudan early in 1992. Brynjar Lia has stated that al-Suri did not move with Bin Laden and his closest advisors at that time but returned to Spain in late 1991 or early 1992, where he resumed a small import-export business.⁴⁵

Spain was an important home for al-Suri for a number of years. He married there in 1987 or 1988 and became a citizen.⁴⁶ He ran a small business and had what must have been a precious home life nestled in his time between his participation in the bitterly fought jihadist insurrection in Syria and his last jihad in South Asia. It was a safe haven, yet it was still enemy territory. Like al-Zawahiri, al-Suri had been involved in jihad almost all his life; jihad was in his bones, muscles, and

nerves. It is hard to think of him living in any place without engaging in his life's real work. Spain might have also served as a protective covering for jihadist activities aimed at Algeria and possibly Syria. Al-Suri's license as a Spanish traveling salesman provided proper cover for trips abroad. The fact that he imported materials from Turkey, perhaps the only land route open to him into Syria, suggests that Spain was a temporary cover. It was a place to recover, read, write, plan, and perhaps train operatives to leave in place.

Al-Suri spends little time discussing the Madrid interlude in his book, which makes sense if Spain was simply a refuge in the early 1990s and not a theater of operations for jihad. On the other hand, his reticence would also make sense if he had contributed to the planning for the horrendous act of brutal terrorism carried out there by an al-Qaeda affiliated cell on March 11, 2004: the Madrid train bombings that according to Spanish court documents killed 191 people and left more than 1,800 wounded.⁴⁷ This attack caused Spanish authorities to issue a warrant for al-Suri's arrest, although no convincing evidence of his direct involvement was put forward. It would be consistent with his concept of operational security, however, to separate his role as a strategist, planner, or even builder of clandestine units from the operational role of those who carried out the attack. In any case, we should not necessarily believe denials of his involvement.

Al-Suri moved from Madrid to London as early as 1994 and then moved his family there in 1995. While there, he was active in Islamist journalistic circles and wrote for the jihadist magazine *Al-Ansar*. He also served the role as the European contact for journalists wanting to know more about Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. For example, Abdel Bari Atwan (the editor-in-chief of the Arabic-language paper *Al-Quds al-Arabi*) recalls that he was surprised to meet al-Suri in the mountains of Afghanistan in November 1996 when he arrived at Bin Laden's mountain lair for an interview: "A man was there

to meet me; I was absolutely astonished to recognize him as a Syrian writer I knew quite well from London.”⁴⁸ Abdel Bari Atwan learned from al-Suri that he had joined al-Qaeda. The London-based editor had not previously known the full extent of al-Suri’s career as a jihadist.

In 1997, another journalist, Peter Bergen, also wanted to interview Bin Laden. Bergen is given credit by Abdel Bari Atwan as one of the few journalists “to appreciate the immense significance of Bin Laden” in the 1996–1997 period.⁴⁹ Bergen had a similar experience. Because he was not based in London, Bergen did not know al-Suri, but he was introduced to him during a series of meetings in London prefatory to traveling to Afghanistan to interview Bin Laden. Al-Suri was one of the men to go to in London if you wanted an interview with Bin Laden. Bergen refers to him as Ali and recollects that Ali was the man who would guide him to Bin Laden.⁵⁰ It was Bin Laden’s media advisor in Afghanistan who would decide whether the CNN crew would get the interview, although al-Suri was no doubt part of the vetting process. Unlike Abdel Bari Atwan’s somewhat leisurely and intimate talks with Bin Laden, the CNN crew received about an hour of tense, stilted conversation. Al-Suri was present and helped Bergen retrieve the tapes of the interview from Bin Laden’s media advisor at the time.⁵¹ It seems fairly certain, therefore, that even though al-Suri was based in London and quite active in jihadist circles there, he traveled between Afghanistan and London and elsewhere in Europe on a regular basis. One of his main concerns in London was consulting with and writing about the jihadist insurrection in Algeria by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

The GIA had a tortured history from its founding in October 1992 until its effective demise by 2006.⁵² One of the major sources of jihadist fervor in the GIA was the influx of Afghan Arab jihadists. Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri wrote a characteristically long book about the history of the jihad in Algeria and the GIA, *My Testimony Concerning the Jihad in Algeria*, which was lost during his flight from

Afghanistan in December 2001 as a result of the American military reaction to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Al-Suri summarized his “testimony” in 2004 to set the record straight about his role in the GIA’s jihad.⁵³ He lays out three reasons why he wrote his account of the Algerian jihad:

1. To record the lessons of this unique experience for the benefit of the coming generations of jihad
2. To communicate the truth to everyone who wants [to understand] the secrets and the realities of this dangerous experience
3. To explain my role in this experience and my relationship to it; to refute the insinuations and distortions of that effort of which I am proud (I leave the reckoning of that to Allah); and to explain that I had no relationship to the evil role of some of the supporters of that jihad [who were] in London during the period 1994–1996. To that end I would provide the details honestly and openly.⁵⁴

Al-Suri thought that Abu Qutada al-Filastini, among others, played an evil role by continuing to support the GIA jihad in Algeria when that organization deserved condemnation. Other jihadists commonly considered GIA activities as deviant and their violence excessive and counterproductive. The group carried out an increasingly violent and indiscriminate campaign against the existing order in Algeria, including targeting ordinary Muslims, tourists, and Christian monks who were considered apolitical and protected by previous assurances of jihadist groups. At the organization’s worst, it declared everyone in Algeria who was not a member of GIA to be an infidel and subject to attack and death.

Al-Suri took pride in being rational and focused on outcomes. He expresses his intent to disentangle his role from the role of others in London, “especially Abu Qutada al-Filastini, his supporters and students.” Abu

Mus'ab al-Suri realized that people thought of him as part of the group in London that wrote about and supported the GIA. It was natural that people would tend to associate him with the opinions and actions of Abu Qutada and his "supporters and pupils." He therefore makes clear in his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* and in *The Summary of My Testimony* that he thought that the road that the GIA traveled was wrong religiously, tactically, and strategically.⁵⁵ The GIA caused ordinary Muslims to associate jihad with "rivers of blood." Any jihadist support for the GIA past a certain point reinforced this widespread impression. If the people are the sea in which the jihadists must swim, the GIA had populated that sea with dangers.

BACK TO AFGHANISTAN

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri tells us that he left London in the middle of 1997 after the Taliban set up a government in Afghanistan, despite the difficulty jihadists were encountering with travel at that time. He was no doubt worried about the attention he was receiving from British authorities and most of all bitterly disappointed with the events in Algeria. In his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* al-Suri spoke about this disappointment and about the failure of the GIA leadership, who by massacring innocents and losing popular support played into the hands of Algerian authorities.⁵⁶ He claims that the success of the authorities against the jihadists in Algeria created a shock among the jihadists in London. That shock, in turn, caused al-Suri and other jihadists of his acquaintance to engage in long discussions that confirmed and fleshed out his early ideas about a new type of jihad. If by 1991 he had formed the outlines of this new strategy, the events in Algeria convinced him that no local jihad, no matter how promising in the beginning, could overcome the powerful international forces arrayed against them. By writing his account of the Algerian jihad, he tried to capture the history and lessons of the jihad in Algeria, just as he had for the jihad in Syria.

The Summary of My Testimony provides autobiographical details about his experiences in Afghanistan, details that are relatively rare among jihadists:

In fact, I arrived in Kandahar in August 1997 and settled into one of the safe houses on the isolated margins of the desert. In a matter of twenty days, I wrote a detailed testimony by means of a history of this matter [Algeria] by studying the documents I had, which were about 130 pages in addition to 65 news reports and official statements. After a few days and after I had shared it with some of the brothers, I revised it and made it ready for publication by the beginning of 1998 and became ardently desirous of publishing it.

But when I showed it [the book] to some of the Jihadist leaders and senior brothers of various nationalities and especially those who had a role in the issue [Algeria] or some relationship to it, almost all of them appealed to me to keep it without publishing it at that time. In their opinion there existed two reasons for that: to avoid causing confusion among the Afghan Arab Jihadists who were gathering anew there and because they were divided concerning question of Algeria and the situation of its factions and numerous groups. As a result the brothers believed that publication of these details would create controversy in a new field of battle about an old question.⁵⁷

Al-Suri took their advice and did not publish his long work but instead continued to gather information about the Algerian insurrection. He came to believe that Algerian intelligence had played a role in the bloody massacres of civilians. He offers no proof of this beyond a vague statement that members of the Algerian military, who witnessed the “ugly plot,” had fled Algeria to make the truth known to the general public.

The Call to Global Islamic Resistance was completed before al-Suri wrote his summary of the history of jihad in Algeria. He made it clear in both documents that *The Call* was to be the most important book he was to write. In fact, one of the reasons he went back to Afghanistan was to rejoin the jihadist front and continue his attempts to convince the foremost jihadists of his time to accept his new strategy in the safe haven of a new jihadist emirate governed by the Taliban. He explains in *The Call* that his most important considerations for returning to Afghanistan were:

- “The relocation of Shaykh Osama Bin Laden and the elite of his administration to Afghanistan”
- “His [i.e., Bin Laden’s] adoption of the concept of confrontation with America and the effort at persuading the ummah [to join] this confrontation”
- “His call to the Islamic ummah under the slogan of ‘expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula’”
- “His adoption—finally—of thinking very close to that which had matured within me in the stages since the Gulf War of 1990”⁵⁸

By including the unnecessary “finally,” emphasized by two dashes, al-Suri gives vent to his earlier frustration with trying to convince Bin Laden of the only rational way forward. Jihadists and sympathizers reading his work in 2005 and afterward would also be aware of heated disputes between the two that would indicate, among other things, that Bin Laden still had his own ideas and did not yet agree with al-Suri’s “new” ones. Among al-Suri’s most nettlesome opinions was his belief that the Taliban were correct in trying to limit Bin Laden’s public statements and other activities that indirectly threatened his Taliban hosts, now that they had a state to lose. Nevertheless, al-Suri concluded that God had granted Bin Laden the qualities needed to lead the jihad against America. Al-Suri’s meetings with the Taliban and Bin

Laden's military leader Abu Hafs al-Masri encouraged him further.⁵⁹ It seems strange that al-Suri, coming off the disaster in Algeria, would be so hopeful upon his return to Afghanistan. It took extreme self-confidence to hope anew when he could recall his own despair of being able to overcome the forces ranged against jihadists in 1990 and 1991. Perhaps the new beginning in what he called the "second half" of the Afghan Arab game intoxicated him. And perhaps al-Suri really thought that he could convince the jihadists gathering in Afghanistan that his strategic concepts about jihad against the "New World Order" should be implemented. As it turned out, this was either an illusion then or a deliberate deception, as he had to write his magnum opus after fleeing the American retaliation for 9/11.

In what he describes as numerous meetings and discussions, the other jihadists were no more accepting of his more developed strategy than they had been in 1990 and 1991. Older jihadists returned to Afghanistan with the same ideas with which they had left. These men had come to Afghanistan to train and prepare for jihad, concerned with forming secret organizations in their own countries, destroying those states, and building Islamic emirates on their ruins. Al-Suri adds that even Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organization failed to convince the organizations and individual young men who had come to Afghanistan that the war with America had already begun.

Both al-Suri and al-Qaeda thought of the United States as the key enemy and aimed to drive its forces out of the region, beginning with the Arabian Peninsula. In his *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, al-Suri claims that he saw some older jihadists, who were not connected with organizations, begin to understand his concepts about global jihad. He claims that after "the events of September" and the American reaction everyone abandoned their former goals and joined the war.

Al-Suri's *Summary of My Testimony* gives a vivid account of the period after the American attack and emphasizes the importance of the Algerian jihad to the understanding of the futility of the regional jihadist insurrections, in the context of the world's hostile response to violent jihadism:

Then came the events of September 2001. Kabul fell and we were forced to leave in a hurry. Despite the fact that I left many things dear to my heart behind, I carried the book of this *Testimony* [about the jihad in Algeria] with me. Then conditions became bad for us as we traveled with the women and children and what was left of the brothers, from mountain to mountain and from one shelter to another. We left the families, children, and the elderly and we had only a little of the necessities left to us. But we had some of my books including that dear study [i.e., the full version of *My Testimony*]. Then conditions worsened and we were forced out across the border into Pakistan and it was impossible to carry anything with us except the clothes we wore in the midst of mountains where American patrols roamed and which were full of ambushes by the Pakistani Army that was assisting them.⁶⁰

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri was finally forced to leave his study of the jihad in Algeria behind with one of the "brothers." He reports that this man in turn was also forced to flee and chose to burn all the books in his possession. Al-Suri regretted that he had allowed himself to be talked out of publishing it in full because he continued to see his history of jihad in Algeria as an important legacy. He determined at that time to write at least a summary but also vowed first to write the full story of jihad and his strategy for the future. He mused that the loss of the books was a loss in the "war of ideas," a concept he attributes to Donald Rumsfeld.⁶¹ He also philosophizes that one of the benefits of isolation is the clearing of the mind to concentrate on writing his

legacy for the next generation of jihadists. This he considers so important that he emphasizes it repeatedly:

And I wrote some studies, which I believe to be important and beneficial (Allah willing). The most important of these was a series of essays, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*. It is [composed of] ten books of more than 1,300 pages and contains a description of the real situation of Muslims during the twentieth century; a summary of the trajectory of the Islamic Awakening during it; and a history of the contemporary Jihadist current from 1920 to 2001; a summary of the Jihadist program and combat doctrine; and a summary of [my] studies of [Jihadist] experiences in various countries. In addition, it includes operational theories for the future of jihad and resistance to the contemporary American-Zionist campaigns and those of its allies, the apostate rulers and their hypocritical subordinates.⁶²

Al-Suri's conclusion from the jihad in Algeria was that local clandestine jihad cannot succeed under the current security conditions, in which the United States and its allies both in Europe and in traditional Muslim lands cooperate to stifle any and all country-specific attempts of jihadists to take control. In traveling to Afghanistan, however, he embraced the concept of global jihad, which would have a regional component not unlike the strategy outlined by Abu Bakr Naji. As we shall see, regional jihad, which al-Suri called "open-front" jihad, was one of three components of his plan.

THE HEART OF *THE CALL TO GLOBAL ISLAMIC RESISTANCE*

Abu Bakr Naji asserted that the lessons contained in his book were based on pure human reason and not Islamic law or religion, although he also claimed that his book contained nothing contrary to the shari'ah. Similarly, al-Suri asserts that he is presenting his "interpretation" based on human opinion, war, and shrewd policy, not

divine law.⁶³ He enters into the main analysis of his strategy toward the end of his book, after he has already reviewed the history of local and regional jihad from the early 1960s until 2001. Like Naji, he assures his reader that his military strategy is not drawn from Islamic law or religion. He begins his analysis by reviewing the range of approaches to jihad and the results of each, to provide a baseline for his approach. The three types of jihad are:

1. “School of movement organizations (regional, secret, pyramidal)”
2. “School of open fronts and overt opposition”
3. “School of individual jihad and small-cell terrorism”⁶⁴

For his analysis, al-Suri uses the following measures for the historical results in each of the three types of jihad he has witnessed:

- Military: results in the field against central government
- Security: of the jihadist organization
- Mobilization: to jihad as a result of the “call” to the ummah
- Education: of recruits and others for future jihad
- Political: establishment of an Islamic emirate

AL-SURI’S ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL RECORD OF JIHAD

1. *School of movement organizations* (also referred to as the school of “secret jihadist organizations”). Algeria and the jihad in Syria against Hafez al-Asad represent al-Suri’s first type of jihad, the “school of movement organizations” (*tanzimat harakiyyah*). These jihads were pursued by organizations with military wings, central policy organizations, and associated networks of connected conspirators. Al-Suri saw this type of jihad as being a complete failure by every measure. They resulted in a military failure historically, because they lost

in the field to the superior forces of the central government. They were security failures because the organizations were universally rolled up by the central government. This type of jihad had also been a failure at the level of the call to jihad (the author uses the term *da'wi* for this measure) because they lacked the ability to mobilize the Muslim community to join them in the struggle. Jihads of these clandestine organizations resulted in an “educational” failure because the secretive nature of the organization inhibited its ability to coordinate its operations at a strategic level that the public could see and understand. Finally, they were political failures because not one attempt achieved its goal of establishing an Islamic emirate on the ruins of the former state.⁶⁵

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri asserts that he is not offering criticism of this type of jihad as an outside observer. He was one who called others to this type of jihad and was a leader and theorist of it. While he may not think this type of jihad, with its secret, hierarchical structure and terrorist operations, is intrinsically hopeless, he believes the new American-led global security structure has certainly made it infeasible. In any case, he emphasizes that times have changed, and jihadists, therefore, need to alter their approach. This type of jihad is simply obsolete. In al-Suri's account:

True I mentioned in the history [i.e., in part 1] that the events of September had finished what remained of the organizations of the Jihadist current—especially the Arab ones—and the repercussions of these events destroyed what remained of these organizations altogether and lined up most of the individuals to be killed or captured. But this is not the cause of the end of this school [of jihad]; it had already ended operationally 10 years before that when the New World Order burst onto the scene in 1990.⁶⁶

The author goes on to point out the obvious: counterterrorism programs in the last decade of the

twentieth century were able to break up secret, country-specific jihadist organizations using the security forces of the various regimes that, in his view, were part of the New World Order. Security forces defeated clandestine jihadist organizations militarily but also politically by isolating them from their populations. He paints a grim picture from the jihadist perspective, describing defeated jihadists and their families, homeless and moving from place to place, impoverished and on the edge of starvation. The author does not point out the flaws in the jihadists' strategy and tactics, which he had pointed out previously in the cases of Algeria and Syria. Moreover, he does not argue that jihadists cannot expect to maintain the support of the people in the context of prolonged and indiscriminate terrorist campaigns. Perhaps he does not want to give his readers the chance to think that "maybe we could change our tactics and try again." Instead, al-Suri paints a world in which the forces arrayed against this kind of jihad are simply too powerful.

To make his point in an even more powerful way, al-Suri includes references to the failures of previous regional secret organizations. For example, he cites campaigns in Morocco carried out by King Hasan II in the 1960s, in Algeria under Chadli Bendjedid in the 1970s, Hafez al-Asad in Syria in the 1980s, and Gaddafi in Libya in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as Mubarak in Egypt in the 1990s. These regimes defeated jihadists using their own resources and coordinating regionally with other regimes. With the United States enabling coordination on a global level, he argues, what chance can future jihadist secret organizations have? In fact, he predicts that security forces in the current context can abort organizations even before they can begin operations. In short, al-Suri is telling those that come after him to forget completely any thought of using the secret jihadist organizational approach that marked the insurrections and terrorist campaigns of the twentieth century.

Al-Suri spends some time on examples of this type of failed jihad. He appears sensitive to the feelings and prejudices of the older jihadists. These are men who have sacrificed a great deal to transform their homelands into Islamic states according to their strict beliefs. They have lately sworn allegiance to al-Qaeda, most likely because they are attracted to the global connections that al-Qaeda can provide. They came to Afghanistan for training prior to returning to their own countries or, if that was impossible, to wage jihad from exile. It was difficult for al-Suri to persuade these men of the futility of the traditional secret organizational approach that characterized most of the jihadist activities over their entire lifetimes. Most likely this circumstance was why he emphasized that he was speaking as an insider, not an armchair critic; it would also explain why he avoided criticizing the methods that these men would have used. Moreover, al-Suri respected these older jihadists and thus abandoned his usual blunt, sarcastic style, if only for a short lesson.

The weakness was not in the methods of the organizations or in the organizations [themselves] in a general sense. On the contrary, it was the changing times and the givens of the new reality after 1990 that made these methods obsolete. I used a metaphor to clarify what I mean in some of [my] lectures in Afghanistan and I will return to it here....

So, [imagine] you have an electric machine that is excellent, powerful, and outstanding! But it works only on an old electric system of 110 volts; then, as happened in our countries, there is a complete changeover of electric power providers to 220 volts. Then, what happens if you were to insist on using it? The machine will be consumed by fire; your electric system will be destroyed and perhaps you will be electrocuted in the bargain! It goes without saying that the weakness is not with the machine itself for it is flawless and perfect for

its time but the surrounding new circumstances made it obsolete. Its natural place became a museum in a corner of a vault as a relic from the past. And your love of it, your beautiful memories with it and the fact that it is a legacy from your parents will not change the reality at all.⁶⁷

Al-Suri spent his entire life fighting against local regimes and rates the entire effort as a failure by every measure. Clearly, he believes that there is indeed something wrong with the machine; it never worked in the first place against Muslim regimes, only against colonial powers, if at all. He soon returns to his harsh delivery and multiplies details of the failure of secret jihadist organizations, underscoring his main point: the United States has introduced an entirely new level of challenge to jihadists. In his words, America “has unleashed the global war on terror with all its means, security, military, political, and economic.” America poses such a severe challenge that persisting in using the methods of this school of jihad “despite the contemporary givens of the situation is, in my opinion, suicide and insistence on failure.” Addressing the older jihadists, al-Suri asserts that the blood of the young men who are dedicated to jihad will be on the older men who refuse to change their ways.

In many passages in his magnum opus, al-Suri tries to show respect toward Osama Bin Laden as the “icon of jihad.” He portrays him as more inclined to al-Suri’s own ideas than other old-time jihadists. This portrayal does not jibe with what numerous firsthand observers report about the stormy relationship between the two.⁶⁸ He does respect the al-Qaeda leader and wishes him success, but he also disagrees with many of Bin Laden’s decisions. An often cited quote reveals al-Suri’s genuine feelings about al-Qaeda strategy. It appears toward the end of the section on secret, regional organizations, after al-Suri has cited a number of “complete” failures:

Before us are a number of screaming examples (and there are others); and so if we do not take

heed of them, we have only ourselves to blame when 80% of our forces have been killed in the backlash from September [9/11] (in the course of only two years!) so that we might realize that the stage of the Tora Bora mentality must come to an end. Times have changed and it is up to us to resolve on a path of confrontation that takes into account the standards of the present.⁶⁹

2. *School of "Open Fronts."* The second type of jihad according to al-Suri involves "open fronts," and he identifies Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya as examples. The open front, as its name implies, is an overt, permanent campaign by jihadist forces. At the time al-Suri was writing, there had been an open front in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and then a second open front during the Taliban phase of the Afghan civil war before the American invasion. From the jihadist perspective, the open front was still operative after the Taliban achieved power because they were still fighting the New World Order.

When al-Suri applies his metrics to open fronts, a far different picture emerges from his assessment of clandestine organizations. He sees success in every area. Militarily he claims the jihadists won in contests that pitted them against far superior forces. Open fronts proved to be a security success because there was no clandestine role for the intelligence forces in an offensive sense and no networks for the opposing forces to disrupt and roll up to the central, secret organization. Instead, operational intelligence was concerned with identifying enemy spies and disabling them.

The third most important metric was the success of the *call*, the mobilization of Muslims both to fight and to support the jihadist efforts. Open fronts are very successful in this regard. What al-Suri does not say is that a large part of that success can be traced to the false coincidence of goals of pan-Islamic classic defensive jihad and al-Qaeda's brand of global offensive jihad. Ordinary Muslims traveled to pre-Taliban

Afghanistan or donated money to the cause because they saw the struggle against the Soviet Union as a classic case of defending a Muslim land against a non-Muslim invader. Osama Bin Laden and the Afghan Arab fighters also had those same motives through most of the Afghan War. After the Soviet withdrawal, al-Qaeda took advantage of classic jihad as a motivating factor to draw Arabs to camps in Afghanistan under false pretenses. The recruitment pitch by then had become one of calling people to train for an open front, but then the camp experience was used to radicalize young men to see the United States as the enemy and global jihad as the purpose. Often, recruits never made the trip from the Afghanistan training camps onward to one of the classic jihad sites, like Bosnia and Chechnya, as they had intended. Thomas Hegghammer points out that between 1999 and 2001 it became extremely difficult for Saudis to reach Chechnya, so recruits often ended up in Afghanistan and Bin Laden's organization.⁷⁰ Al-Suri's point, however, remains valid: what he calls "open fronts" were a great success from the point of view of recruitment and fundraising.

The next metric that al-Suri cites is education, what others might call "radicalization" or "indoctrination." Unlike a secret organization, open fronts have the space to educate the public, starting with the recruits to their ranks, who can receive training in military science and tactics while acquiring a proper understanding of jihad by experiencing it and studying it. Furthermore, there is in place the structure of an Islamic emirate, in which the leader can act as a role model and exercise great influence. On this last point, al-Suri states that jihadist leaders have fallen short of the mark by failing to provide the level of education that is possible in open-front situations. In fact, jihadist leaders in the Soviet conflict did not yet see the United States as the enemy, reserving that status for the Soviet Union, their existential threat. In the end, Islamic education, however spotty, did occur, and al-Suri assesses the net result as positive.

The last metric is political success, which generated mixed results. In the case of Afghanistan, the success according to al-Suri is complete. The Soviet forces were driven out, the local communist regime overthrown, and an Islamic emirate was established under the Taliban. The author claims that the political goal in Bosnia was to save Muslims from genocide, and to that extent the jihad was successful. Furthermore, al-Suri states that “establishing an Islamic emirate in the heart of Europe under the auspices of the New World Order was not possible.” Al-Suri does not claim that Chechnya achieved its political goals, but its resistance against great odds was a kind of “historical victory” anyway. Political success, in general, takes longer and is more difficult to achieve than military success, according to al-Suri.

On balance, despite its limited political success, al-Suri concludes that open-front resistance has been historically far more successful than clandestine terrorist organizations. But he has one significant caveat about open fronts. Previously, al-Suri had argued that the United States had arrayed all the powers of the world against the armed jihadists, who stood alone. He concluded that a new strategy would be needed. At this juncture, however, his caveat focuses on America’s military superiority, which is sufficient to make even open fronts impractical after 9/11: “But the theory of the staying power of fronts was subjected to collapse around the world after September 2001, when America used its legendary technological superiority to implement its strategy of decisive missile and air strikes and to establish total air and electronic warfare superiority. We will discuss this later, if God wills.”⁷¹

It is important to note that al-Suri is not opposed to open fronts along the lines of Afghanistan or even Yemen. Instead, he is arguing that open fronts are useful only when the conditions are right. The main obstacle to open fronts in the New World Order is that the balance of power is tipped so far in favor of the West. When one

looks at open fronts from this perspective, it would seem that if al-Suri were still operating today, he would support the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and at least consider al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to be viable now that it is headquartered in Yemen. To these open fronts, however, he would add the dimension of individual terrorism and isolated, small-cell operations, which is his third school of jihad. This last addition seems to be included in the way that AQAP conducts its terrorist campaign today, and it is also an element within Pakistani movements associated with al-Qaeda. Al-Suri came to believe that American military superiority was so great that there should be a moratorium on open-front jihad, one likely lasting a long time. In this judgment, al-Suri is reflecting the lessons he learned from his years of studying and teaching guerrilla warfare: the most important decision a guerrilla leader can make is when to launch guerrilla warfare.

3. *School of individual and small-cell jihad.* When al-Suri turns to what will be the centerpiece of his “new” strategy, he invokes Islamic history to point out that small operations, whether they be assassinations or other types of attacks by small groups of jihadist fighters, are as old as Islam itself. He claims that since the Gulf War of 1990, this type of jihad had experienced a resurrection. He then lists a number of operations, beginning with the assassination of Rabbi Meir Kahane in New York in 1990 and the 1993 attempt to blow up the World Trade Center by Ramzy Yusuf and others. His other references are to well-known attacks on tourists in the Middle East.

Before al-Suri reviews the results of these terrorist acts through his metrics, he makes a telling comment about the environment in which these attacks were taking place: “The observations about this spontaneous method, which began to spread with the intensification of American attacks on Muslim lands and the adoption of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine and the propagation of news via satellite and communications networks, is as

follows ...”⁷² The repetition of the usual complaint about American attacks on Muslims and the “Zionist” plan in Palestine is standard fare for al-Suri. What is new is the emphasis on spontaneous attacks. The list he serves up to the reader includes what seem to be mindless acts of violence using whatever weapons were at hand, often knives. As significant as the spontaneity, however, is the existence of satellite television and the Internet. Television news, with its powerful images, had become available in people’s homes all over the Middle East, which never had significant international television news from local organizations before satellite TV. Also, the Internet’s forums and e-publications suddenly gave jihadists a modern weapon to use against their modern enemies. The only real use of these “spontaneous” acts of violence is as propaganda. An act might seem senseless and even deranged, but jihadists can add a narrative to the act after the fact to give it meaning and context to appeal to some segments of the Muslim community, which are ready to accept such violence as a just response to perceived injuries by non-Muslim foreign powers.

The author observes that small-unit terrorism became a military success because it spreads fear among the enemy and baffles the security services of target nations. If there is no network to roll up, the damage done to the jihadist enterprise is restricted to the individuals captured or killed by security forces. The author claims: “I benefited from these observations to a great extent in the design of the operational concept of cells of the *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*.”⁷³ His observations on the importance of this approach to mobilizing Muslim communities are very similar to his earlier commentary: the perpetrators of these acts can become minor heroes, at least to local Muslim youth. In the jihadist narrative, these spontaneous acts awakened a spirit of revenge among the youth, who came to view formerly unknown figures such as Ramzy Yusuf or the murderer of Meir Kahane as icons of jihad. Clearly, such a result was exaggerated by al-Suri, but there is no doubt that the

narrative applied by jihadists to some of these widely separated and essentially unconnected terrorist acts and their perpetrators has had a radicalizing effect on isolated young men in Internet cafes or in their rooms in Europe or the United States.

When al-Suri turns to the other measures he uses to gauge impact, he finds little evidence to cite as results. He does not try to claim success either in terms of a political result or an “educational program.” In effect, he gives these measures a pass by implying that his operational concepts can create the conditions where results are possible. Having spent his entire adult life watching security agencies in a number of countries destroy jihadist organizations, the author is struck by the security aspect of individual acts of terrorism as well as their propaganda value. The fact that this approach to terrorism provides a hermetically sealed battlefield is important to al-Suri. While not yet proven effective in pushing the jihadist political project forward, he has a strategic program and context that, when added to individual jihadist operations, has the potential to make them more effective against the West and especially the United States.

Al-Suri concludes his review of the schools of jihad by deducing two major conclusions. The first is that the clandestine, regional organizations like those in Africa, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere must come to an end. He concluded in 1990–1991 that the time of clandestine groups was over; now in 2003–2004, he is hammering the point home with what he considers historical proof. No secret organization has ever been successful. They were either destroyed by security forces or forced to compromise with a powerful central government, as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had done over time. Compromise for al-Suri and many others in al-Qaeda’s current of thought is tantamount to leaving the field of jihad. The second conclusion of al-Suri’s review is that there were two ways forward: jihad in open fronts and individual and small-cell jihad. These last two were his

legacy. As we have seen, open-front jihad is essentially a different perspective on Abu Bakr Naji's *Administration of Savagery*, and individual and small-cell jihad has echoes in Naji's concept of "paying the price." Foremost in al-Suri's concept is that jihad must become global in nature, with the objectives of diluting enemy forces and, most importantly, gaining the support of Muslim communities worldwide.

AL-SURI'S LEGACY TO THE NEXT WAVE OF JIHADISTS

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's centerpiece legacy is his "military theory of the call to global Islamic resistance."⁷⁴ He adds to this the organizational theory and operational system in the global Islamic resistance units.⁷⁵ He lays out the military doctrine and strategy of open fronts and introduces his strategy of how individual and isolated-cell terrorism could work. He shows the relationship of these isolated units to the open fronts. Much of his thinking is similar to what one can find in Naji's writings. The two men use different technical terms and are not, therefore, fully consistent in technical matters, but they are more alike than different. Taken as a whole, their concepts confirm an underlying understanding of what the grand strategy was before Bin Laden's death and will likely continue to be under al-Zawahiri's leadership of al-Qaeda Central. Nevertheless, one could say that Naji is the optimist while al-Suri is the defiant pessimist. This difference manifests itself most in their treatments of "open fronts," which Naji refers to as "regions of the administration of savagery." Naji supports open fronts at the time of his writing, while al-Suri claims that the time for open-front guerrilla warfare was something that in 2004 seemed impossible until some time in the remote future.

The reason for al-Suri's pessimism is more than the accumulation of failures in his personal history. He was in awe of American military might and security reach. He experienced the attack on Afghanistan under President Clinton and again after 9/11 and had studied the

American invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. As we discussed above, he recognized America's ability to control airspace and dominate electronic warfare. He has pointed out that even under President Clinton the United States had the ability to put a cruise missile in every room in every building of an Afghan training camp if the command was given. He also recognizes that the United States can airlift fully equipped military units wherever and whenever it needs to do so. He names battle after battle in Afghanistan and Iraq in which U.S. technology was simply too powerful for jihadists in the field. Nevertheless, he did not think open fronts were forever impossible, only at the time he was writing and for some unknown period in the future.

AL-SURI'S DOCTRINE OF GUERRILLA WAR

Like Naji, al-Qurashi, al-Muqrin, and other al-Qaeda strategists, al-Suri subscribes to a classic three-stage guerrilla war strategy loosely following the Maoist model.⁷⁶ For al-Suri these three stages are:

1. Stage of exhaustion
2. Stage of balance (or equilibrium)
3. Stage of decision or liberation⁷⁷

The first stage involves light guerrilla warfare or terrorist attacks devised to weaken the enemy's resolve and will to continue the fight. In al-Suri's words, this stage involves assassinations, small raids and ambushes, and selected bombing operations. The purpose of this stage, as in Naji's schema, is to cause the enemy confusion in a political sense and cause military and economic exhaustion. In the second stage, guerrilla warfare moves up a notch to large, strategic attacks. These attacks compel the forces of the central government or the United States and its allies to confront the guerrillas. This is a stage in which the forces of the two sides are on more equal footing. The guerrillas occupy areas temporarily and likely put primitive administrative systems in place, but they cannot yet consolidate their

positions.⁷⁸ The weapons associated with this stage include crew-served machine guns, light artillery, mortars, and mines. Al-Suri also recommends the use of portable ground-to-ground missiles and more sophisticated explosives. In the final stage, the guerrillas are able to consolidate the areas they previously controlled, on a temporary basis, and move to create an Islamic state or emirate. Once again, the wording is different from Naji's, but the basic concept is the same. In the end state, the regular forces of the enemy are driven out and jihadist forces take over. Jihadist forces at this point have some if not all of the characteristics of a regular army.

The three-stage schema for guerrilla or jihadist warfare represents the strategy for what al-Suri refers to as "open fronts." This is not a new concept for al-Suri; he has taught it previously in jihadist training camps and on recordings that he distributed. It is his interpretation of classic guerrilla warfare adapted to the jihadist context and refined over the years. He is fully aware of its genealogy with Mao, Giap, Che Guevara, Castro, and others. Open-front warfare is the term al-Suri uses to describe the situation that Naji describes. The three-stage phasing had been taught by Yusuf al-Uyayri and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin as well. The words vary, but they are all talking about a concept that has been discussed and taught in various training camps. All these jihadist strategists and leaders had experience in Afghanistan. The variations in the strategy appear in the details of the phases. Al-Suri reserves open-front warfare for specific areas, especially as the enemy he has in mind first is the United States.

For al-Suri, open-front warfare has certain preconditions, but individual or isolated small-unit operations could be carried out literally anywhere: "At this time, it is possible to carry out individual jihad anyplace in the Arab and Islamic world, or anyplace in the world because it is not dependent on any objective conditions where it might occur. On the other hand,

open-front jihad requires strategic conditions necessary to achieve victory after Allah grants us success.”⁷⁹

Because of his historical research concerning the outcomes of jihad all over the world, al-Suri concluded that only regions similar to Afghanistan provide the conditions for successful guerrilla warfare. Urban guerrilla warfare based on a clandestine group definitely will not succeed. This conclusion is similar to Che Guevara’s concept that the countryside is the strategic choice for the guerrilla, not the city, where they are more easily discovered. (There are many dissimilarities between the Marxist-based analysis of Che and the jihadist ideology of al-Suri, but the requirement for a great central idea that appeals to the people is a given in both systems.) Geography is one of three major factors for open-front jihad in al-Suri’s thinking, the other two being population and political factors.

The geographical factors are:

- Large land mass
- Varied landscape and long borders
- Difficult conditions for blockading or restricting movement
- Relatively rough mountains and forests or other factors that help channelize advancing forces—wooded mountains are best
- Sufficient food and water resources in case of a blockade⁸⁰

According to al-Suri, the population should be large but spread out over the vast landscape so that their movements are difficult to track. The people should demonstrate military prowess and have ready access to weapons. For example, any significant Afghan tribe has its own armorer and a tribal code that provides an ideal underpinning for guerrilla warfare. Similarly, the Yemeni tribes have ready access to weapons and the ability to use them. Al-Suri and other jihadists often remarked on

the relative unsuitability for jihad of soft urban youth, although he is clearly dealing in a universal cliché for which there are numerous exceptions.

The political factors are the most important; they are also the abiding Achilles heel of the al-Qaeda movement. The one-size-fits-all Salafist jihadist ideology alienates large numbers of Muslim communities that al-Suri thinks are otherwise ripe for jihad, for example the countries of Central Asia. He often counsels tolerance for the customs of tribal peoples like the Pashtun people, who are the backbone of the Taliban, or similar tribes of the countries of the former Soviet Union in Central Asia. The key political factors that produce a climate for revolution, according to al-Suri, amount to what communist ideologues of the twentieth century recognized, but without the class analysis. The conditions for revolution or jihad are generally those that arouse the local inhabitants, although there are a few universal touchstones, such as non-Muslim, foreign invasions. “The best of these conditions which give rise to resistance are foreign invasion and the proliferation of politico-religious, economic, and social causes of revolution and jihad. This is what is termed in books about guerrilla warfare ‘the climate for revolution,’ while we use the term ‘the climate for jihad’ in our literature.”⁸¹

When al-Suri turns to his examples of open fronts, he notes that Afghanistan was a complete success—before the American counterattack. It has all the geographical features that lend themselves to guerrilla war, the tribal population made excellent soldiers, and there was an abundance of weapons. Politically, it had the factors that would lead to success as well. Al-Suri notes that Afghanistan had both a religious and tribal motivation to repel the invasion by Soviet forces. Chechnya was a military success and was able to mobilize the population even though it occupied a small land area and had a relatively small population. According to these metrics, Chechnya was a success in all but the political outcome. Perhaps to avoid calling Chechnya a failure, al-Suri

simply notes that it is a political failure *until now*. The author considers Bosnia to have been a general failure except in obtaining support from the ummah.

Al-Suri lists four areas having the prerequisite conditions for open-front jihad:

1. Afghanistan
2. Countries of Central Asia and Transoxiana (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, southwestern Kazakhstan)
3. Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula
4. Morocco and North Africa (west of Egypt)⁸²

It is safe to assume that the author listed these regions in order of importance to his concept. He is still dedicated to the concept of an Islamic emirate in Afghanistan. He refers to his earlier study of Central Asia, in which he argues that the resources in Central Asia are impressive and a potential source of Soviet-era weapons, especially nuclear weapons.⁸³ Afghanistan is the gateway to this area. Central Asia is the business remaining to the Afghanistan jihad after the fall of the Soviet Union. He is more enthusiastic about jihad in Yemen than in Saudi Arabia. Yemen is the key to the entire landmass of the peninsula. He also argues elsewhere in the *Call* that he considered Yemen a good candidate for al-Qaeda's central headquarters as early as 1989.⁸⁴ Finally, he lists North Africa despite his bitter experiences in Algeria because, with the exception of Egypt, it contains all the characteristics necessary for open-front jihad. Like the populations of the first three regions, North Africa's Berber population, in al-Suri's estimation, is well suited to warfare.

Open fronts are necessary for the ultimate success of the jihadist enterprise. For this reason al-Suri spends time explaining the ideal conditions for open-front jihad. However, he points out that defending from fixed positions *at the wrong time* is one of the greatest vulnerabilities for guerrilla forces. He supports his

assertion by citing the “books of the great theoreticians of this military art such as Mao Tse-tung, Guevara, Giap, Castro, and others.”⁸⁵ His analysis of the conditions confronting jihadists since the overthrow of the Taliban led al-Suri to conclude that open-front warfare must be set aside for a considerable time, but with an important caveat:

The conclusion now is: the basic axis of military resistance operations against America and its allies at this time must remain within the framework of light guerrilla warfare, urban terrorism, and secret methods—especially at the level of individual operations and small resistance units fully and completely unconnected from one another. But despite that, I would say: any imbalance in the scales in favor of the armed forces of the resistance and jihad that nullifies America’s exercise of control over those places that fulfill the conditions for open fronts will bring back the issue of open confrontation. Then, Islamic forces must seize the goal of liberating the land, consolidating it, and establishing the seeds of a political entity under the shari‘ah.⁸⁶

It is ironic that al-Suri cites communist authorities to justify his own conclusions, but at the same time, it is normal. The strategists of jihad believed that they were employing human reason and time-tested military principles. Al-Suri will reach into communist texts or American manuals to provide the concepts and methods he needs for success. He knew that Mao, Giap, and Guevara argued that guerrillas should establish strong rural bases when faced with an overwhelmingly powerful enemy. At the same time, Giap makes much of taking advantage of the right conditions to make decisive moves, for example to launch an insurrection or to move to the decisive phase. Like al-Suri, Giap claims to have learned the lessons of successful guerrilla warfare the hard way, through studying mistakes of others and mistakes of his own movement. Like al-Suri, Giap cites

the conditions necessary before a people can “rise up.” Unlike al-Suri, Giap was writing from a position of power within a well-organized revolutionary movement. The conditions for the Vietnamese uprising that launched successfully in 1945 were that the National Salvation Front was already unified all over the country; people were ready to sacrifice themselves in launching the insurrection; the ruling circles in Indo-China were driven to an economic, political, and, military crisis; and the objective conditions were favorable to the uprising.⁸⁷ In the jihadist world when al-Suri was writing, the equivalent of none of these conditions existed in any priority areas for open fronts. The Taliban in Afghanistan had been thrown out, the jihadist movement was disjointed and scattered, and the rulers in the various countries were not yet in crisis. As for the “objective conditions,” it is hard to imagine a greater disparity between Japan by 1945 and the United States in 2004.

We have repeatedly cited twentieth-century communist strategists when we examined al-Suri, Naji, Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi, and Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin. These strategists are also important for other jihadists such as Yusuf al-Uyayri and still others that we have not named for the sake of time. For now, it is sufficient to point out that al-Suri and the others were steeped in the classic guerrilla strategists. They absorbed the guerrilla theories by listening to tapes or live lectures, reading books, or simply engaging in conversations with other jihadists. For some, no doubt, hearing lectures on Robert Taber’s *War of the Flea* was sufficient. Giap, credited by some with defeating the United States, is given close scrutiny by the jihadist strategist community and has been cited by the Taliban on occasion. After the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Russian strategy was not in vogue, although many early insurrectionists in Arab countries were exposed to the Soviet version in Moscow and other locations in which the Soviet Union trained young Arab revolutionaries. Al-Suri was more comfortable thinking and speaking in this revolutionary mode than he was writing about the fine points of Islam, although he cited

the Qur'an and hadith numerous times in his *Call for Global Islamic Resistance*. Reasoning strategically in 2004, al-Suri concluded that the jihadist enterprise against America and its allies had been set back to the earliest stage of the classic three-stage guerrilla strategy, in which the guerrillas are widely dispersed and engaged in harassing attacks on soft or isolated targets in order to exhaust the enemy and force it to dilute its efforts against jihad. For al-Suri, the objective circumstances of this stage are that the United States is overwhelmingly powerful in all relevant areas: military, political, and economic. These circumstances require the creation of individual cells and cadres widely dispersed wherever there are Muslims. It is this central concept to which we now turn.

INDIVIDUAL TERRORISM AND THE UNITS OF GLOBAL ISLAMIC RESISTANCE

Before al-Suri begins his explanation of his new concept of individual terrorism, he tries to dispel the cloud that hangs over the term "terrorism." If the Salafist jihadist current wants to attract volunteer terrorists, it needs to dispel public misgivings about those who engage in such activities. The author points out that one of the most successful aspects of the American campaign against jihadists is its mastery of the media. Like Naji, al-Suri points out that America has been able to define the terms of the confrontation. In his view, this has resulted in imbuing terms such as "terrorism" and "terrorists" with the meanings that America and its allies intend. The United States has been so successful in this regard that Arab and Islamic media and even members of the Islamic Awakening, the Salafists who are generally sympathetic to jihadists, tend to view "terrorism" as if it were an accusation of vice and an invitation to disaster.⁸⁸

Al-Suri recognizes that this negative attitude is widely shared and must be countered. The author turns to a common argument used by jihadists: there is good and bad terrorism, but the word itself is neutral. In other words, terrorism in service of good cause is good;

terrorism for an evil cause is evil. Terrorism performed by jihadists is, therefore, good and just. This is the kind of argument that can convince only those who need no convincing. The author employs another argument based on reciprocity. Al-Qaeda members generally argue, for example, that because the American government conducts assassinations and other acts that should be considered terrorism against jihadists, it is hypocritical to accuse jihadists of terrorism when they perform these same types of operations against the United States or other enemies. His analysis is noteworthy because it confirms his recognition that Muslim public perception of terrorism as a crime is no different from its negative perception by the citizens of Europe or the United States. Perceptions of terrorism are slippery, but the public usually attaches the term to attacks on civilians or noncombatants. This common perception is an enormous obstacle to the achievement of another key goal of al-Suri's strategy: uniting the ummah against the United States. Unless al-Suri's strategy can mobilize Muslim public opinion to the side of the jihadists, it will have no political outcome.

Al-Suri in effect admits that the strategy he is about to explain in detail is an effort when all other efforts have failed, outlining "the conditions and requirements that necessitate the implementation of the methods of individual jihad operations":

1. "Failure of operational methods of hierarchical secret organizations under the attack of state security organizations."
2. "Inability of the secret organizations to incorporate all the young men of the ummah"
3. "Expanding presence and diversity of the goals of the enemy, making it difficult to stand up combat fronts and establish centralized organizations"
4. "Collapse of the concept of [open] fronts and confrontation from fixed points as a result of the

enemy's deployment of the strategy of decisive air attacks using destructive rocket bombardments and air strikes directed by satellites which rule the earth and even see below the surface through advanced technology"⁸⁹

Despite the potential power of 1.6 billion Muslims in the global ummah claimed by many jihadists, al-Suri was forthright about the jihadist failure to rally the Muslim community to the cause of jihad against America or even within a single Arab country. The one exception, according to al-Suri, occurred in the so-called open fronts like Afghanistan, but even there the American military proved too powerful when helped by local Afghan allies immediately after 9/11.⁹⁰ The interesting element in the list just cited, however, is the widespread presence of the United States and its allies in Muslim lands. What al-Suri is proposing is to turn this American advantage on its head. A widespread presence presents many targets for jihadists. The question is how to take advantage of these targets. Al-Suri, in his despair of all other efforts, captures the essence of his plan in a single paragraph of one long sentence.

In consideration of the expanse of the ummah and the vast arenas in which the targets and interests of the invading enemy are to be found; and, because not all young men wishing to contribute to the resistance are able to travel to the [open] battle fronts (indeed it is better to say the establishment of fronts like these will not be possible in the foreseeable future!), our path [forward] will be based on guiding the Muslim, who desires to participate and [be part of] the resistance, to operate where he resides or where he is able to [act] naturally and go about his public life normally while practicing jihad and resistance secretly by himself or with a small cell of trusted people, who form a secret, independent [unit] for jihad and resistance, as well as individual jihad.⁹¹

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's intention in his new strategy is to give guidance and inspiration to individual Muslims, mostly young men, to perform terrorism against those the jihadists consider to be enemies. These young men are to become terrorists in their own countries without belonging to an organization. Al-Suri found, as all theorists of guerrilla war have found, that terrorism is effective in the first stage of guerrilla war. In al-Suri's terms, he considers widely dispersed terrorist attacks aimed at demoralizing and exhausting the enemy to be the first stage of jihadist strategy. Al-Suri, no doubt, also learned from classic guerrilla strategists like Giap that insurgents should act only when objective circumstances favor action. He concluded that the vulnerability of traditional hierarchical jihadist groups to security forces is too great for the jihadist enterprise in the age of the "New World Order." He posits that individual terrorists and terrorist cells frustrate the security services of the world because only the cells themselves or individuals are vulnerable. Moreover, al-Suri argues that the time for open-front confrontations with the United States and its allies, including local governments, must be pushed to the future. Because al-Suri is concerned with strategy, he does not devote any time here to tactics and methods; instead he turns to priorities and organization.

Marc Sageman in his book *Leaderless Jihad* uses data he has compiled about terrorist networks to argue for the existence of a new kind of jihad by what he sometimes refers to as "wannabe" jihadists. According to Sageman, these are young men who become radicalized on the Internet or perhaps at a radical mosque and turn to terrorism as jihadists without an organization and without a leader. This kind of problem is a local police problem and is unconnected to al-Qaeda and unschooled by any grand strategy except in the vague sense of a vision of establishing a new caliphate and returning Islam to its former glories. Sageman argues that the drivers of this kind of terrorism are social networks and social pressures among a small group of friends. He also asserts that the Internet keeps these

leaderless, unconnected groups together but that they are not coordinated. They may be inspired by Sayyid Qutb or Abdullah Azzam and be guided by a vague overall strategy, but their very local nature prevents these leaderless jihadists from moving to a political stage in any country. Sageman credits the right-wing Louis Beam with promoting a comparable idea of leaderless jihad in the United States and remarks that Abu Mus'ab al-Suri had a similar concept.⁹²

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's concept of individual and small-unit jihad is not the same as Sageman's "leaderless jihad" or the recent popular characterization of "homegrown terrorism," although they resemble each other superficially. Al-Suri constructed his concept on the observation of a subset of Sageman's leaderless jihad, that is, the outraged/humiliated individual Muslim who acts violently on a sudden impulse. Like Sageman, al-Suri recognized that such actions were not tied to any strategy or larger purpose. Al-Suri did not stop there, however; instead, the heart of his book is devoted to constructing a system whereby acts of emotional violence could be turned to serve a greater strategy. Furthermore, as I mentioned above, al-Suri intended to bring such individual terrorism into a system of classic guerrilla strategy, leading back to the reestablishment of what he calls "open fronts." One needs to consider al-Suri's enterprise not so much as a new strategy but as a recalibration of the stages of classic guerrilla warfare based on the objective circumstances after 9/11. Al-Qaeda had been successful; the inner circle, to which al-Suri belonged at the time of 9/11, had fully engaged the United States. Then, al-Suri found the United States to be more than the jihadist community had bargained on.

OPEN-FRONT JIHAD AND INDIVIDUAL AND INDEPENDENT-CELL JIHAD

Al-Suri knew that open-front jihads existed at the time he wrote his magnum opus. He most likely understood that groups would still create open fronts in regional insurrections regardless of his recommendations. From

this perspective, it seems natural for al-Suri to describe the relationship between these two approaches. Al-Suri also recognized that the “global resistance units” (that is, the independent units) would not all be impressionable young men sitting at their laptops or in an Internet café. Some of these men would be veterans of jihadist insurrections or clandestine conspiracies. The men returning from Afghanistan, for example, were instrumental in supporting jihadist activity in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and North Africa. Veterans of Iraq would be expected to provide a similar impetus in their own countries and regions. So even though al-Suri did not recommend establishing new open-front jihad, he saw that there could be some benefit to them.⁹³

The first benefit of using these men is the most obvious: military experience. Open fronts would give individuals the benefit of real experience with explosives and firearms that they could not easily obtain otherwise. This would have to be accomplished under the strictest security protocols because the risk of discovery would be high. For this reason, al-Suri cautions against any activity in the open. To benefit from these fighting fronts, individuals need to fight in the front lines, place themselves under the command of the leader of the front, and sever or at least minimize discoverable ties with their home countries. Al-Suri also points out a benefit to the greater effort because recruiters can take the measure of those coming to insurrection battlegrounds to select those who could be sent back to their homes to practice terrorism using skills they learned in the insurrection. Al-Suri cautions, however, that for security reasons the process just described should not take the form of a secret organization stretching from the open front back to the home country, which would create connections for the security forces of the home country to use for its own purposes.

The author does not spend as much time discussing the relationship of independent jihad to open fronts as he does on the training of independent cells. According to

al-Suri's description, this training is mostly done in safe houses or temporary camps similar to those in which al-Muqrin trained recruits in Saudi Arabia ([chapter 3](#)). Both Naji and al-Suri agree that the best training for jihad is participation in jihad itself. This is where the participation of unaffiliated young men in a guerrilla war, however hopeless, could be a valuable tool for al-Qaeda. The advantage is that any jihad will do—the motivation need not be in accordance with al-Qaeda's revolutionary concept.

Al-Suri and other al-Qaeda types had a great deal of experience radicalizing young men who came to fight in Afghanistan. In some cases, young men came to fight the Soviet Union; in other cases, men came to train for Chechnya or some other area. These young men came motivated by the impulse to participate in classic jihad, but some of them left believing in the revolutionary jihad against the United States and local Muslim regimes. This is the real significance of open-front jihad for al-Suri. What al-Suri is suggesting is that recruits be sent forth with his concept of independent action rather than to join a clandestine group and thus be subject to the same obstacles and threats that security services have always posed to these groups. To borrow from al-Qaeda's ideological rhetoric, these young men would return as "strangers" within their home communities and quietly practice their newly acquired skills. Some would fail almost immediately, but al-Suri is betting that some will succeed. As he states clearly, he gave a course to jihadists in Afghanistan in 1989 with the title "Terrorism Is a Talent."⁹⁴ The trainers in local insurrections would have the responsibility to choose those who have the aptitude, the "talent" for terrorism. Next, the trainers must give these men practical military experience and training in the use of weapons, explosives, and perhaps poisons.

Finally, the young men that survive the tour in the insurrection can be sent back to the countries from which they came or other suitable countries to carry out resistance. Al-Suri likens the concept of the global

Islamic resistance to the Palestinian intifada. In 2002, Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi had used the intifada as an example of fourth-generation warfare: warfare without a front based more on exhausting the opponent and gathering world opinion on its side than on destroying enemy soldiers for the conventional military objective of control of a particular parcel of land. The number of these “talented” young men can be quite small; al-Suri does the math for his readers:

I return to what I mentioned in the section on military theory: the importance of the concept of global resistance units throughout the Islamic world comes from their [physical] dispersion and the concentration of their efforts. So, as I said previously—if twelve resistance units are formed up throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic world and each unit carries out one operation per year, we would have an operation a month. And, if they carried out two operations, we would have an operation every fifteen days. This is something the most powerful organizations cannot accomplish. So what do you think—if the concept convinces one hundred individuals during the year of its launch and fifty of them are able to operate and carry out two or three operations per year—the result over time would be that the jihad of the resistance units would be mentioned several times a day. This will scrape the scab off the wounds of the enemy and prompt Muslims to action. May Allah (praise be unto Him!) bless this concept, prepare its men for it, bless all their efforts, and show the enemy defeat and seal us with martyrdom on his path.⁹⁵

In this passage, al-Suri never mentions fourth-generation warfare, but this borderless war that aims at changing the international political atmosphere and garnering the community’s support fits comfortably within the concept championed by al-Qurashi.⁹⁶

THEORY OF THE ORGANIZATION AND SYSTEM OF GLOBAL ISLAMIC RESISTANCE UNITS

Abu Mus'ab al-Suri reviews the foundations and constituent parts of traditional secret organizations, repeating material he had presented in a lecture in Peshawar in 1990. This simple explanation of five basic terms represents how jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda, have traditionally organized themselves. The five building blocks are:

1. *Manhaj* (program): the concept and driving ideology upon which the organization's members convene
2. *Qiyadah* (leadership): the emir, shura council, administration, a way of taking decisions
3. *Mukhattat* (plan): strategic plan of action to achieve goals
4. *Tamwil* (funding): material means to meet the needs of executing the plan
5. *Bay'ah* (oath of allegiance): system of bonds between the emir and his subordinates⁹⁷

This five-element structure also describes al-Qaeda after al-Suri's capture in Pakistan and more importantly after Bin Laden's death. This structure remains even as al-Qaeda's basic strategy has adopted some of al-Suri's theory of individual and independent-cell jihad. Al-Qaeda is not a traditional, secret, regional organization like the GIA in Algeria or even like the organization established by al-Zarqawi in Iraq before he pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. What distinguishes al-Qaeda is not its structure but rather its global focus and the choice of the United States as its primary and fixed enemy. In al-Suri's schema, some central organization like al-Qaeda Central must exist to inspire the far-flung independent units and to turn their operations, successful or not, into propaganda for the spreading global Islamic revolution. Because al-Suri does not want to emphasize al-Qaeda, which is a temporary organization—jihad, in his concept,

is permanent—he writes about his new strategy in general terms. Al-Qaeda Central, however, has in fact become like al-Suri's central resistance circle, which is not hierarchically connected to its franchises and sympathizers throughout the world. International news media often recognize the nonoperational nature of al-Qaeda Central but often fail to mention that this is a deliberate design feature of the new al-Qaeda. It is now known that Bin Laden attempted to encourage specific terrorist operations from his hideout in Pakistan; such encouragement is far from a chain-of-command order, but by engaging even in these minimal organizational activities, Bin Laden sealed his doom: the American security services were able to find him by tracing his contacts with couriers.

How can the resistance units stay independent? The Internet is an imperfect answer. As long as al-Qaeda Central or a similar organization can remain secret while providing virtual educational and propaganda programs for the resistance units, the nonhierarchical structure might be maintained, and the slogan “system not organization” might become a reality. So when al-Suri presents the differences between the traditional clandestine organization and the system of the resistance units, the reader should not interpret the traditional organization as an alternative designation for al-Qaeda. The system of global resistance units, however, is intended to be a temporary alternative to al-Qaeda's hierarchical franchises that operate in what al-Suri refers to as open fronts. What is sometimes referred to as “Al-Qaeda Central” today plays a role similar to what al-Suri calls the “central unit,” and contrary to al-Suri's recommendation, it has not given up on “open fronts” in the form of regional affiliates.

Implementation of global Islamic resistance units should be seen as a variation of the traditional use of guerrilla forces during the three stages of the classic Maoist insurrection. It appears that al-Suri originally intended this kind of terrorist strategy as an adjunct to

regular military forces during stage two (equilibrium) of classic guerrilla war, in which guerrilla forces are strong enough to hold their own with the regular army of the enemy and may operate from permanent or semipermanent bases. Units would then assist in the decisive phase, in which the armies of jihad would finally defeat all enemies near and far, at least on the battleground of traditional Muslim lands. Once again, al-Suri mentions the evolution of his theory, making clear that there is a pre-9/11 version and a post-9/11 version. He makes the comment in a short paragraph entitled “Setting up Cells and Units (System of Setting up and Operations)” as follows:

When I laid out the theory of resistance in final form in 2000 in Kabul under the umbrella of the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan [during] the days of the Taliban, I began the attempt to set up the first nuclei in Afghanistan. The form of the organizational setup (as I explained in a series of studies [entitled] *Jihad Is the Solution* and the video studies [entitled] *Resistance Units*) took the form that I will explain in this section. I will mention after this the modification that the repercussions of events of September and the American campaigns forced on us and brought about a concept that is a better fit with the current reality.⁹⁸

The “theory of resistance” that al-Suri had been teaching for a decade involved three circles of resistance units. The modification, as we shall see, involves a tactical retreat to two circles. The three circles in the author’s terminology are:⁹⁹

1. Central Circle
2. Coordination Circle (Noncentralized Units)
3. Call Circle (General Units of the Call to Global Islamic Resistance)

The first circle produces guidance and propaganda, what al-Suri would call education. In some instances, it would also produce funding for specific operations or startups. Such funding would not be provided directly, however, but might be provided through the second circle. The central circle does not have a command-and-control relationship over the other circles. It plays a guidance role only, transmitting communications about ideology and military strategy and tactics in a general sense. Al-Suri also expected this circle to build a centralized military capability within regions containing “open fronts” similar to what was established in Afghanistan and to carry out its mission without compromising itself or the open-front organizations—although maintaining security in such circumstances is obviously problematic, as was shown by the attack on Bin Laden’s secret compound in Abbottabad. As discussed above, this approach would seem to work only if open fronts exist throughout the world. This first circle is also expected to build relations with any groups that can assist with the “call to global Islamic jihad.”

The second circle is the circle of open guerrilla-warfare fronts. These communicate with the central circle, but ideally there are no organizational or operational ties that would allow security forces to monitor them and roll up the entire organization at will. Each decentralized circle, to use al-Suri’s term, or each open-front leadership group can oversee the education and training of those within its open-front region, for example, the circle for Yemen within Yemen, the circle for Algeria within Algeria. The other key mission of this circle is to travel to other regions all over the world to set up the third circle. Because of the example he has of Afghanistan, al-Suri is likely thinking that there will be any number of foreigners within the open fronts; these foreigners, if their situations allow, are called on to go home to help organize individual and small-unit jihad there. These individuals would then launch on their own in an entrepreneurial spirit, without any continuing contact or support from the centralized circle and little or

no contact with the decentralized circle from which they came. Finally, the leaders of these decentralized units of the second circle (e.g., Yemen or Pakistan) are given the mission of providing the members of each open front with military training and spreading necessary skills as widely as possible within each open front and to the third circle.

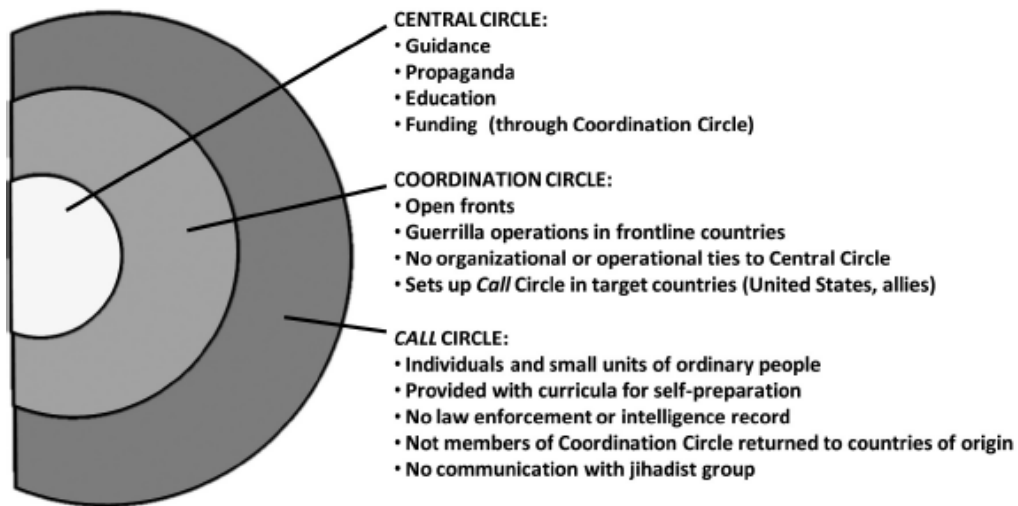


Figure 5.2 Al-Suri's Ideal System of Jihad

This third circle (that is, clandestine cells) is the real basis of al-Suri's *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, the endpoint of his theory. It contains individuals and small units that are prepared and ready to devote themselves to terrorism against the perceived enemies of al-Qaeda's current, which they would describe as enemies of Islam. According to al-Suri's theory, propaganda and recruiting is intended to inspire individual jihadists to strike priority targets identified by the disconnected and hidden leadership as strategic prizes in the long war. Ideally, these are ordinary people without any police or intelligence agency record against them, like Nidal Hassan, the Fort Hood shooter. They are ideally not members of al-Suri's second circle newly returned from Afghanistan or Iraq to their home countries. Al-Suri likes on occasion to frame a slogan to teach an idea; the slogan for the third circle, echoing al-Zawahiri and Lenin before him, is: "The Resistance is a battle of the ummah and not a struggle of the elite."¹⁰⁰ The purpose of the *Call* (ideally) is to enable young men to take part in a terrorist

campaign in the countries where they live without communication with any other jihadist group: “The link, as we have previously stated, is confined to a shared goal, a shared name, the program of a shared jihadist ideology, and a comprehensive educational program. They [third-circle units] are provided published curricula¹⁰¹ (all the materials necessary for self-preparation) and have direct insight into operations according to a clear disciplined program.”¹⁰²

Brynjar Lia points out that al-Suri deliberately uses terminology associated with the mystical current within Islam, Sufism, in explaining the relationship of the third circle to the central circle.¹⁰³ Al-Suri points out that members of large Sufi brotherhoods are not linked together organizationally across the globe but manage their affairs following general guidance and ideology and practices learned at the local level. The founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, one of the best-organized groups in the Middle East, adopted Sufi organizational principles to a certain extent, so the idea is not original with al-Suri.

At this point, al-Suri proposes a modification to the above schema. It is important to emphasize his point again because it is the only real difference between al-Suri and al-Qaeda’s approach to war against the United States and its allies after 9/11. Even as he explains his modification, al-Suri emphasizes his hope that he might one day return to the three-circle schema he has just outlined.

But first I will point out the repercussions of the events of September, the collapse of the Emirate of Afghanistan and the final collapse of the theory of centralized confrontation after the American military attack [which was] overpowering materially, technologically, and in manpower on every level. This [collapse of the theory of centralized confrontation] was confirmed in the limited confrontation that took place between the centralized, open forces of the mujahedeen and

the forces of the American campaigns in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, and in other sites such as Yemen among others. I became completely convinced of the strategic importance of individual, secret operations and of the focus on the fundamental circle of the call to resistance, i.e., the circle of the general call [the third circle]. So, I believe that it will be a long time (Allah knows best!) before it will be possible for us or for another [group] of mujahedeen to be able to centralize a second time to engage directly from fixed defenses and confrontation along open fronts. So, the given facts of the current situation force us to operate between two circles: the first and third.¹⁰⁴

In desperation, al-Suri has given up on planning for open fronts and the important terrorist training role such fronts can provide. Having just witnessed the United States and its allies roll up the Taliban government, almost fully disrupt al-Qaeda's leadership, and kill what he thought was 80 percent of its active terrorist assets, al-Suri concluded that Afghanistan and similar jihadist locales were not near-term options. The American global system was simply too powerful in his estimation. His remedy is to suggest that the global jihad confine itself to a central office, for professional guidance in every sense, with independent terrorist units or cells all over the world. This despair was the product of the specific time when he was writing and its circumstances. He had not given up the vision of an Islamic awakening according to the violent norms of al-Qaeda. He still thought the three-stage guerrilla war and the three circles of terrorist operations were requirements for ultimate victory. The three-circle model is what al-Qaeda is using today. Al-Suri's hope for a return to the three circles of terrorism is expressed almost as an aside:

If Allah grants me life until the balance [of forces] we hope for occurs and the possibility is returned to us for consolidation and fixed point defense, I

would then work to resume what I began with the creation of the three circles in an operational sense; for, that beginning was promising and encouraging. Moreover, I am not opposed to examining that experience, which collapsed as other jihadist attempts did in the midst of the repercussions of September and the fall of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵

Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri did not take al-Suri's advice to give up on open fronts for the time being, but they appeared to have finally accepted the advice he had been trying to give since 1990 in creating the system of three circles of jihad instead of a single organization.

THE OPERATIONAL UNITS OF THE THIRD CIRCLE

There are three types of units¹⁰⁶ within what al-Suri calls the third circle:

1. Builder units that create operational units (these can be one person)
2. Operational units
3. Agitation or propaganda units

Builder units specialize in the dissemination of the concept of the "Call" to young men and persuade them to form operational units. These units must be experienced enough to pass along military and security training as well as the ideological underpinnings of the "Call to Global Islamic Resistance." This process is similar to a "train the trainers" program familiar to modern military organizations, but it must be performed clandestinely. This would appear to be a very difficult task for even the most experienced trainers and operatives, especially given that a builder unit could be a single person.¹⁰⁷ Its success, therefore, would depend on a cadre of very experienced jihadist operatives with experience in guerrilla warfare and terrorism. The last gift of the builder units to the operational units is the donation of enough money to get started.

Al-Suri takes pains to show how this process is different from a traditional clandestine organization. The training should take a month or two and target four or five units separately. These units would then build a number of elements under each one of them. The builder gives the operational units a date before which they should not operate. This assigned date gives the builder a period of time to depart from the country where the training takes place before the units begin operations. The builder thereby creates a number of operational units without knowledge of one another and no connections either to one another or to the builder; nor do they know where the builder is going. Al-Suri provides a diagram¹⁰⁸ to indicate the isolation of each operational unit that oddly uses the Latin alphabet in the midst of the surrounding Arabic:

|A| |B| |C| |D| |E| |F|

Al-Suri points out that under the system of clandestine jihadist organizations before his concept, organizations depended on the “cluster” system; clusters of trainers would live within one of the open fronts like Afghanistan or Chechnya beyond the reach of the “New World Order.” At the time that al-Suri was writing, however, he concluded that there were no longer any safe havens beyond the reach of the American global security system. For this reason, the author has recommended a system that is more secure, if potentially less effective.

Al-Suri recognizes also that individuals may spontaneously decide to form a unit alone or with one or two friends. These individuals would have only al-Suri’s book, and other materials recommended in his books that are available on the Internet, to guide them along this path. The author acknowledges that the Internet can facilitate the dissemination of training material for terrorism in a way that was not previously possible. In one ominous passage, al-Suri reflects on how effective a

clandestine unit can be without any prior experience or any connection to a jihadist organization. It is obvious that the author is trying to inspire individuals to form clandestine cells within target countries, and the chief target is the United States:

A small unit with two or three elements, which has the least experience and study of the tradecraft and principles of clandestine operations, may achieve military and security competence; moreover, if it has a high terrorist culture, it may undertake astonishing and terrifying operations. It may also move its operations throughout its country and to a number of cities. One who is unacquainted with it [the small unit] cannot imagine that there are tens of operating groups within the country; but I have numerous stories and eyewitness accounts, and glorious examples of that but space is too constrained to provide the details.¹⁰⁹

In a 1,604-page book, it is absurd for al-Suri to say he has no space to give his readers the important examples of horrific operations carried out by relatively inexperienced small groups. It is more likely that he did not want to implicate himself in those “astonishing and terrifying” terrorist acts. Despite the suspicions of the Spanish authorities, no hard evidence that al-Suri was connected to the horrific bombings of the trains in Madrid has ever surfaced. The real point is that someone delivered general guidance and training to those responsible for the bombings in Spain. That there is no trace of those connections would be what al-Suri intended, whether he had anything to do with the bombings or not. One other possible example could well be the London train bombings on July 7, 2005.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, these types of independent groups and isolated jihadist terrorist operations are exactly what al-Suri urged, whether they be in Europe, the United States, or in the Middle East.

The third type of independent unit is the secret propaganda or agitation unit.¹¹¹ The author describes this unit as a very small unit composed of one to three “elements” with communications skills. This unit would not have any knowledge of the locations or identities of the operational units that actually carry out terrorist operations. The propaganda unit’s mission is to supply information and inspiration to the operational units. The members of this group must have competency in the shari’ah, politics, and guerrilla theory, as well as in strategic awareness and expertise in communications. They should have expertise in using the Internet and electronic communications:

The mission of these units is to spread the Call to Resistance and distribute its literature and researches, and studies and various programs by secret means, especially the Internet. It should translate the researches and communications of the Resistance into Muslim languages and world languages. Despite attention to the distribution of materials, these units will devise ways to operate in keeping with the possibilities in each country and place in which they operate.¹¹²

Abu Mus’ab al-Suri cautions that when the builder units establish other units in a region they must take great pains to keep propaganda and recruitment activities strictly separated from the military and terrorist side. Media activities and public fundraising by their very natures are subject to detection by security agencies. If there is no firewall between these groups, security agencies will be able to follow the stream from the propaganda units to the operators. Furthermore, if the independent units are operating in a Western country, propaganda activities may be legal; however, if propaganda units have actual connections with terrorist units, propaganda activities may become illegal by association. Al-Suri advises that all units be clandestine and completely separated one from the other; moreover,

active terror cells must never take part in media activities.

Al-Suri contemplates the spontaneous emergence of small terrorist cells. He urges that such cells not engage in anything except terror. He also recognizes that a builder cell could emerge within a single country and never move outside. In such a case, all he can advise is that the head of such a builder unit consider a suicide operation to remove any threat to the cells he has created.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

According to al-Suri, one of the greatest lapses in the jihadist movement was the lack of education and training at all levels in all aspects relevant to jihad. This is an issue he had a great deal of time to contemplate in his years of teaching at various levels in Afghanistan. At the end of what he calls the “heart” of *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri contrasts previous training methods with those required after the fall of Afghanistan and in the time of small-cell terrorism, what the author calls “Global Islamic Resistance Call Units” (hereafter call units).

By the grace of Allah, over the course of the past years I have worked with most of these [training methods] as a trainee, a trainer, and then as supervisor of training in our special program in the days of the Taliban. By means of a comprehensive review, we found that Jihadist insurrections (*al-tajarib al-jihadiyyah*) employed one of the following ways:

1. Secret training in [safe] houses
2. Training in small, secret military camps in the areas of operations themselves
3. Public training in state-sponsored safe havens
4. Public training in camps of the open fronts

5. Training in areas of chaos and ungoverned spaces¹¹³

In his usual fashion, al-Suri reviews the good and bad points of each of these training methods. According to al-Suri, all clandestine jihadist groups, starting with the Muslim Brotherhood jihad in Syria, have used the first method of training. He claims that this kind of training generally involved assembling and disassembling light weapons and the theory of how to aim and fire them, etc. This method does not allow much live fire training, and al-Suri comments that the first time a recruit fired his weapon was often during his first terrorist operation. Nevertheless, this kind of training was effective and useful. Al-Suri comments that the second method of training in small mobile training camps is very effective, addressing small-squad tactics in urban and rural guerrilla warfare. It may involve the use of explosives and other useful military skills. Al-Suri claims that this kind of drilling can produce a fully effective jihadist terrorist.

When al-Suri turns to training in safe havens provided by states, he becomes more expansive and autobiographical.¹¹⁴ This kind of training was very common during the Cold War, or, in Suri's terms, before the New World Order. Every jihadist group of any importance took advantage of this training, which was extremely useful in military terms. Al-Suri reflects on the training he received in Iraq and Egypt during the jihad in Syria. Iraq in particular trained many jihadists and provided material support in every type of weapon except airplanes. Jordan provided a limited version of this training, as did Egypt. Al-Suri has high praise for the special course in urban warfare and special operations under the auspices of the Sadat government while he was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood's jihad against the Syrian regime. The author goes on to reflect on Shi'ah training (against Iraq) under the auspices of Iran in Syria, Lebanon, and Iran. Basically, al-Suri portrays the Middle East as an interlocking system of

international guerrilla training, in which groups like the IRA, the Turkish Kurdish Workers Party, and the Iranian Mujahideen-e-Khalq participated. The one drawback was the requirement for jihadists to avoid political indoctrination and the blandishments of the various intelligence agencies involved.

Open fronts offered training that al-Suri considered so familiar to his readers that he did not feel the need to provide details. He mentions Afghanistan during the Afghan jihad and during the Taliban era, approximately 1986 to 2001 in the author's reckoning. Many jihadist groups and others benefitted from Afghanistan's training camps. According to al-Suri, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa provided similar training on a much smaller scale.

Abu Bakr Naji wrote about training in what he called areas of the administration of savagery. Al-Suri reflects on this phenomenon as well.¹¹⁵ In Naji's focus, these areas are like security zones in guerrilla warfare, secure guerrilla bases, or areas that jihadists have created within existing states where the government no longer governs and where jihadists have moved in with a primitive administration. Al-Suri comments that before the New World Order many such areas existed, especially in tribal areas in Yemen, Somalia, the tribal lands of Pakistan, and sub-Saharan Africa. For al-Suri before the New World Order, training in ungoverned, anarchic tribal areas had little appeal to jihadists because it involved high costs and provided little in terms of military training beyond what could be offered in small, temporary training camps or safe houses. Once the United States became fully engaged, its forces closed many of these areas to jihadist forces, although al-Suri notes that there are still many ungoverned spaces where at least local jihadists can train. But writing in 2004, al-Suri saw even these areas as closing down under the pressure of American power.

But today in the course of [American] campaigns it has become apparent that these [training]

methods are being eliminated along with the elimination of the remote areas that offered them. Thus it is not practical or even possible in the current conditions to establish open fronts. It is no longer possible for states to open safe havens and military camps for Islamists or Jihadists. Regions of chaos, moreover, are about to come under American control and locked down such as the tribal areas in Yemen, the tribal areas in Sarhad in northwestern Afghanistan, the Saharan belt across the middle of Africa and elsewhere.

Thus it has become clear that the only path remaining possible for us now in the world of the American campaign and international coordination of counterterrorism is secret training in safe houses and temporary military camps.¹¹⁶

What al-Suri saw as true in 2004 and 2005 remains true today. The refinements of American counterterrorism technology have increased, and the ability of countries to set up permanent training camps is diminished. Al-Suri does not fear the American deployment of conventional military force, which affects only states for the most part and generates excellent propaganda. Instead, he is concerned about counterterrorism and international coordination led by the United States. So he recommends safe houses and temporary camps spread only among the Muslim communities either in Muslim countries or Western nations. To be successful, however, those Muslim communities need to cooperate, and to date the success rate of global jihadists seeking community cooperation has been slight.

We have discussed the inability of al-Qaeda so far to gain significant support of even conservative Muslim communities in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In the United States, authorities rely on ordinary Muslims to expose criminals in their midst, as do authorities in North and sub-Saharan Africa. Al-Suri recognized the problem and argued that Salafist jihadists did not appeal to Muslims

outside a narrow band of Arab communities. It may be the reason that he did not want to be personally associated with the flag bearer of Salafist jihadism, al-Qaeda after 9/11.

Finally, we can see how important training is for carrying out effective terrorist attacks. Random lone-wolf terrorism is possible but not sustainable. All al-Suri's individual and small-unit terrorism scheme accomplishes is a continuation of random terrorist acts to exhaust an enemy in stage one of the classic three-stage guerrilla warfare in which all al-Qaeda affiliates were trained. Unaccompanied by open-front insurrections, such acts are politically meaningless. What really are being exhausted in this system are the remnants of sympathy for al-Qaeda. The one element of the confrontation that al-Suri perceived better than did most of his comrades can be summarized in a single sentence: the deep battle, the battle of ideology, has yet to be fully engaged. By the time of Bin Laden's death, the United States and its allies had become expert in fighting the close battle with al-Qaeda. In the realm of psychological operations (PSYOPS), the West has sometimes been clever and other times far off the mark.¹¹⁷ In the works of al-Qaeda's strategists, we have seen ways in which the deep battle could be engaged as well as results of the organization's attempts at regional jihad to date. Next, we need to examine how we can pull together favorable elements of the democratic narrative to counter the global jihadist narrative, which has not yet been defeated, only driven further underground. Examining how general al-Qaeda strategy may be used against the jihadist narrative is our last topic.

Conclusion

What It All Means

Al-Qaeda's strategic inspiration may be traced to the writings of twentieth-century strategists of communist revolutions and the borderless fourth-generation warfare model first recognized by a few American military strategists in 1989. To defeat al-Qaeda as an organization, the United States has waged the close battle of counterterrorism and military counterattack using both conventional and unconventional forces. To defeat al-Qaeda as the idea and inspiration for future jihadist revolutionaries, the United States and its allies need to pursue the deep battle of ideas. To engage in the deep battle against al-Qaeda effectively, the United States can use the enemy's strategic literature to help inform a counternarrative designed to undercut both active support of and passive sympathy for al-Qaeda and associated groups within Muslim communities. The American counternarrative should have at least three components:

1. Demonstrating that al-Qaeda and its adherents cannot win the close battle
2. Restoring respect for America by showing how the U.S. constitution provides the legal framework for dignity, democracy, and jobs for its own Muslim community and that American foreign policy is guided by the same principles as its domestic policy
3. Using al-Qaeda documents and activities to show that the core of its jihadist doctrine is secular in nature and is not based on Islam, despite many claims to the contrary

AL-QAEDA CANNOT WIN—IT CAN ONLY DESTROY

Al-Qaeda's strategic doctrine contains a fundamental contradiction that will prevent it from ever winning. On the one hand, its strategists claim that America can be defeated if Salafist jihadists use unconventional, fourth-generation strategy and tactics, which require that al-Qaeda belong to no state and maintain no borders; at the same time, al-Qaeda's main requirement is to set up an al-Qaeda state in the heart of traditional Muslim lands, a fixed point that removes all the asymmetrical military advantage against the West and its local allies. Thus by winning al-Qaeda loses, by presenting the United States with a conventional enemy state that could not withstand American conventional military superiority. Moreover, al-Qaeda, despite its brutal tactics, is today farther away from establishing a state than ever and is mired in terrorism and blood without any hope of winning.

In 2012, after years of sustained pressure in the close battle, al-Qaeda is likely at one of its weakest points since its expulsion from Afghanistan in late 2001. We have learned that al-Qaeda's core, sometimes called al-Qaeda Central and similar terms, is a rather small group that has become an inciter or coordinator instead of an executor of terrorist operations. In examining the thought of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, we have seen evidence that this role (for al-Qaeda Central at least) was not accidental. Rather, it emerged out of necessity, in the face of a global counterattack on all fronts and as a hybrid of al-Suri's thinking and Abu Bakr Naji's strategic vision of local jihadist insurgency in service of global jihad. In the end, we can judge that al-Qaeda the organization is all but finished, but al-Qaeda the idea of jihadist international resistance remains a dangerous force that can violently threaten and disrupt—but that cannot build a stable structure. If al-Qaeda's plans are thwarted in top-priority areas like the Arabian Peninsula, we can expect them to refocus on other energy-rich regions, such as North Africa and Nigeria. Moreover, if

al-Qaeda is prevented from using the traditional revolutionary tools of bombs and bullets, we should expect it to use other tools recommended by the strategists, like cyber attacks. Pakistan will remain a dangerous crucible: it is the nexus of al-Qaeda and local jihadists, embedded in the second largest Muslim country in the world—which also is armed with nuclear weapons.

The American counternarrative can demonstrate that al-Qaeda's ideas can lead to bloodshed, mostly against other Muslims, but never to military victory. In fact, its own writings demonstrate that military victory in a conventional sense is not even a goal. American accomplishments in the close battle include:

1. Destruction of the safe haven in Afghanistan
2. Disruption of the safe haven along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border
3. Transferring the battle in Iraq to the Iraqi government and withdrawing U.S. forces
4. Working with Saudi Arabia to destroy al-Qaeda cadres inside the kingdom and forcing al-Qaeda to retreat to Yemen
5. Working with regional allies to disrupt numerous terrorist attacks
6. Establishing an international counterterrorism network that involves both financial and police actions
7. Improving the intelligence war and using drone attacks to disrupt al-Qaeda and its allies' activities in Pakistan and other areas
8. Capturing or killing a large number of key al-Qaeda leaders in al-Qaeda's top-priority areas
9. Killing Osama Bin Laden and isolating al-Qaeda Central

10. Disrupting known terrorist attacks inside the United States

RESTORING RESPECT FOR AMERICA

Abu Bakr Naji and other strategists emphasized the need to undermine traditional respect for the United States by portraying all favorable reports about the United States as the effects of a “deceptive media halo.” Al-Qaeda and its fellow travelers treat all positive news reports as though they were government controlled and all criticism of the United States as established truth. The Western news media are in the best position to refute such blanket accusations because documentaries and news reports that explore controversial issues and criticism of the United States are powerful vehicles to demonstrate the freedom that Western media enjoys in criticizing their own governments. Giving reputable foreign media free access to the American market is another way to enhance the message that the United States and other Western countries are not afraid of criticism, despite al-Qaeda propagandists’ false accusations of some obscure conspiracy of lies.

For now, the Middle Eastern and South Asian press have a limited exposure to the U.S. market. Encouraging respected news organizations from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia to run stories on American life, including how American Muslim communities fare in an open democracy, has the potential to create credible narratives and images that will be of great interest to Muslim audiences outside the United States. Meanwhile, the Western media could attempt to demonstrate that far from wanting to compel Middle Eastern populations to comply with some Western plan, they simply want to inform as well as entertain the public and win customers thereby. Whenever jihadists cite negative stories criticizing the United States, the counternarrative should serve up frequent reminders that critical press coverage of the government is itself evidence of a healthy democracy.

Abu Bakr Naji recommended another way to destroy the respect Muslims have for the United States: by forcing America to fight its wars directly or, in his terms, to stop using "proxies." I have argued above that the United States must vigorously pursue the close battle, but there is an important distinction between the negative aspects of this kind of direct attack and the deployment of conventional American troops for long periods, which could easily be characterized as an occupation. A drone attack or a Special Forces operation will generally draw a negative response from local populations, to be sure, but they will not have a lasting effect unless the attack involves documented noncombatant casualties. In every case, these operations are and must be carefully weighed with a risk/reward analysis. Invading a predominantly Muslim country, however, apart from being extraordinarily costly, is likely to give credence to jihadist claims that the United States is at war with Muslims, if not with Islam.

Conversely, drawdowns of U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan can serve American officials as empirical evidence that jihadist claims are false. Far from being a humiliating defeat, as al-Qaeda and its adherents claim, these events are proof that the United States never intended to remain indefinitely in Iraq or Afghanistan. Such statements by Americans may or may not have the intended effect in Iraq or Afghanistan, but if they are made in good faith, other Muslim communities will judge the United States by its actions to good effect over time. Wherever conventional American troops are based for any length of time, the United States must make sure that foreign media understands this American troop presence is always covered by legal agreements with the host government, something that has a respected place within Islamic jurisprudence. This message needs to be crafted and broadcast in such a way that both local Muslim communities and those far from the troops in question know why American forces are there.

The term “proxies” is a remnant concept of the Cold War and has no place in American discourse. Giving assistance to and building relationships with strategic allies, however, is always preferable to direct American military involvement. Good examples of this cooperation can be seen in Saudi Arabia’s actions to thwart al-Qaeda in its jihad in Saudi Arabia (2003–2006) and its reported notification to Western security forces that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had placed explosive devices inside office equipment being shipped through Europe to the United States. Not all examples can be as clear. Arguably, the war in Iraq against al-Qaeda was won on the basis of Americans accepting Iraqi Sunni factions’ offer to put the radical Sunni jihadists out of business, which is a better message to emphasize in the Middle East than a press statement asserting that the American troop surge was the deciding factor. This is not an argument against direct American military involvement; it is an argument for a rapid American deployment of combat forces for military objectives and a rapid withdrawal after those objectives are achieved.

Both civilian and military analysts have pointed out that development assistance and good-governance programs offer powerful concrete arguments against the blandishments of violent jihadists like al-Qaeda. This tenet is at the heart of our counterinsurgency doctrine. Because of their experience, developed nations can help other countries with the mechanics of establishing modern states, but only those countries themselves can perform “nation building.” In other words, Americans can help, but only Iraqis can build Iraq, only Afghans can build Afghanistan, and only Pakistanis can build their own future. It is beyond the scope of this book to argue the preference of counterterrorism over counterinsurgency, but al-Qaeda’s strategic literature does provide evidence that violent jihadists would prefer that America engage in counterinsurgency; their retooled Maoist strategy works better in these circumstances. The United States can use its planned withdrawals to send the message that America is not a colonial power, does

not desire an empire, and keeps its commitments. American forces came with overwhelming military power and will leave the region with that power intact after dealing al-Qaeda a strategic defeat. Meanwhile, rather than turning our backs on Yemen or Afghanistan, the United States must be willing to continue to help. If we can forget about fast-burning, large-footprint projects, the costs can be sustainable.

Thwarting Recruitment

In addition to reestablishing a positive narrative about American society and role in foreign affairs, by reassessing strategies of long-term conventional military deployment and by supporting development and good governance, the West can respond to some of Naji's explicit statements of al-Qaeda's goals. According to Naji, one of al-Qaeda's major goals has been to replace the human losses suffered over decades of regional jihadist insurgencies through several stratagems:

- Dazzling potential recruits by jihadist operations against America
- Angering potential recruits by America's direct interference in the "Islamic world" and its support for Israel
- Transforming suppressed anger among Muslims against regional authoritarian regimes into committed anger

There is ample material here to work against al-Qaeda's strategic goals. First, al-Qaeda has been forced to take credit even for failed operations because they have so few successes inside the United States. American casualties in Iraq were meanwhile reduced dramatically and then eliminated since the United States turned over combat operations to the Iraqis and withdrew its troops in accordance with previous bilateral agreements. It is also relatively easy to demonstrate that al-Qaeda has been foiled on many occasions both in the region and in attempts on the U.S. homeland. The United States

should claim its successes and recognize that much credit is owed to regional allies. On the whole, though, a realistic picture can be painted that after 9/11, al-Qaeda became the international gang that cannot shoot straight, despite its ability to branch out beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan. They can attack private individuals in the Middle East and South Asia and treat them with a level of brutality that inspires disgust rather than awe, but targets inside the United States or Europe have become increasingly hardened as the Western counterterror network grinds down al-Qaeda capabilities.

Even more damaging to their narrative is the continuing death toll: al-Qaeda has killed many times more Muslims than the targets they claim to be attacking. This has been true in Algeria, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan, and Pakistan. Studies such as West Point's "Deadly Vanguard" need to be ongoing, constantly refreshed, and publicized. When the methodology is clear, solid, and based on open sources, there is a distinct opening for traction even among professional skeptics of the European and Middle Eastern press. The website *Spiegel Online International* in December 2009 published an article written by Yassin Musharbash with the title "Al-Qaida Kills Eight Times More Muslims Than Non Muslims."¹ Al-Qaeda operatives are hard pressed to counter such factual reporting, which makes their radical talking points increasingly unpersuasive. Al-Qaeda recruits have little chance of fighting, let alone killing, Americans, but they have a great chance of conflict with other Muslims.

Naji's second talking point—American support for Israel—has been a constant al-Qaeda theme, which affects the emotions of Muslim communities across the Middle East, including those with no sympathy for al-Qaeda in any sense. These communities are, on the other hand, sympathetic to Palestinians in human terms, not merely in ideological terms, and many states have taken in large numbers of the Palestinian diaspora. Since the United States will never abandon its support

for Israel, these rhetorical attacks will continue. The United States, however, can and will continue to work on establishing real peace between Palestinians and Israel based on security and justice for both sides. The factual message is that al-Qaeda has never done anything to help Palestinians; has no proposed solution to the problem; does not support Palestinian demands for democracy; and, given the chance, would trample on the rights of Christian Palestinians. In addition, al-Qaeda clearly uses the Palestinian situation as a vehicle for demagoguery, while the West and its regional friends have consistently sought a negotiated resolution. Al-Qaeda's strategists scorn agreements between Palestinians and Israelis, and although no one should be under the delusion that a positive, comprehensive agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would prevent radical jihadist propaganda, it would take away its force. Al-Qaeda has never supported any peace proposal, has not missed an opportunity to criticize Palestinian negotiations with Israel, and has never proposed anything less than the destruction of Israel.

The Arab Spring, marked by popular uprisings against authoritarian regimes, is a complex phenomenon that is different in each country in which it occurred, and its outcomes will depend on local developments. One remarkably consistent fact about the Arab Spring, however, is that none of the uprisings had anything to do with al-Qaeda or its message. No matter how much al-Qaeda tries to find opportunities in the aftermath of these uprisings, it can never change this widely recognized simple truth. A credible counter-narrative to al-Qaeda's propaganda concerning the Arab Spring is to point out that successful uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia chose nonviolent methods. Even in Libya, where the opposition was forced to resort to violence, help came from al-Qaeda's enemies in the West, not from al-Qaeda. Similarly, in ongoing events in Yemen, al-Qaeda's chapter has had no influence on the central struggle, although AQAP has tried to take advantage of the instability for its own purposes, not to address the needs

of the people. Similarly, al-Qaeda appears irrelevant to the original protests in Syria, although it will try to find a role as long as the violence, instigated by Syrian government repression, continues. Government and private-sector commentators have made many of these points. The messages need to be part of a continuing narrative, and American actions need to support its words. In addition to political support, a number of small programs that support civil society and good governance are funded by the United States. The most important aspect of these programs is to enable American not-for-profit organizations promoting good governance and democracy to interact with emerging civil society organizations in other countries. These programs can provide training in anything from how to conduct modern, fair, and open elections to techniques of modern police forensics, which will help break the cycle of police violence by providing modern methods of obtaining evidence. These programs are cost effective, but they always require funding from charitable organizations or the federal government. Cost is always an issue, but the costs of these programs are almost negligible when compared to the cost of military programs to fix problems these democracy promotion programs could help prevent.²

Countering Homegrown Terrorism

One of the major concerns periodically expressed by top American officials is the threat of homegrown or lone-wolf terrorists, what some call “sleeper cells.” The concept of a sleeper cell is not new and was a feature of the Cold War. It is probably a better term because it captures the dangerous dynamics of a true al-Qaeda cell. Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri described best the ideal characteristics of an al-Qaeda sleeper cell. His emphasis was not on the use of the Internet, although he recognized its potential, but rather on clandestine individual or small-cell jihad as a means to further jihadist political goals. He began where most discussions of lone-wolf terrorism end, with a random act of violence

by an individual infused with a sense of rage and perceived humiliation. Al-Suri was interested in the ability of individuals to strike terror into communities by a single act of violence. He saw that such random acts, despite their momentary impact, did not lead beyond themselves. What if the impulse to violence could be organized and channeled for a political goal? Al-Suri believed that sleeper cells could not be part of a clandestine network in the modern security environment. A network, no matter how cleverly constructed, is still vulnerable to modern technology, especially when the target is the United States or a European country. No system is perfect, but since 9/11, the United States has certainly improved, and funding should remain available for further strengthening of its security apparatus. When we consider truly homegrown jihadists, however, it is crucial to remember that American Muslims who believe in the rule of law in civil society and value a system that protects their rights and the rights of others can be the best antidote. American Muslims who are fully respected and whose rights are protected on an equal basis with all citizens are the best proof that al-Qaeda is wrong.

In the United States, violent minority radical elements have existed traditionally on both ends of the political spectrum. The Muslim community is not exempt from occasionally witnessing individuals drawn to al-Qaeda style violence. Al-Qaeda's ideologues try, so far in vain, to exploit racial, economic, and religious fault lines within American society, as they do in every society they target. Al-Qaeda's recruiters try to prey on Muslims, moreover, who do not know very much about Islam. Al-Qaeda's documents openly acknowledge that knowledgeable religious authorities—from very conservative Salafists to more liberal Muslim scholars—overwhelmingly reject its revolutionary views and interpretations.

To the extent that individuals may try to heed al-Qaeda's call for individual terrorism inside the United States, they would plan to harm as many people as they can, to draw attention to their ideology in an attempt to

polarize American society along religious lines. And even if al-Qaeda were to disappear, their videos, articles, and books will remain salted all over the Internet in unexpected places. The cost of one individual's decision to follow al-Qaeda's line can be high. In 2009, the Fort Hood shooter caused the deaths of thirteen people and wounded thirty-one. The risk could be greater if an individual has received training in bomb making. If Najibulla Zazi, trained in explosives in a terrorist training camp in Pakistan, had not been arrested before he could carry out his bomb plot in 2009, or if Faisal Shahzad, allegedly also trained in Pakistan, had managed to detonate his bomb in Times Square in 2010, we could have witnessed casualties on a massive scale similar to the Madrid train bombings in 2004 or the London public transport bombings in 2005.

Preventing large-scale terrorist attacks in the United States or elsewhere involves a combination of a successful close battle by police and intelligence agencies and a deep battle on the part of society as a whole. The noted terrorism expert Brian Michael Jenkins has concluded: "As long as America's psychological vulnerability is on display, Jihadists will find inspiration, and more recruitment and terrorism will occur."³ The key to the deep battle, then, is for Americans to understand what al-Qaeda hopes to achieve through homegrown terrorists and not give them the gift of ideological success by overreacting when the police safety net fails. More importantly, if the United States experiences such a failure, the blame should be placed squarely on those ideologues who designed the international system of terrorism and the individuals who executed the plot. Neither Islam nor the Muslim community should bear the blame; such assertions are undeserved and play into al-Qaeda's strategy. On the other hand, a diverse, prosperous, and integrated American Muslim community will frustrate al-Qaeda's strategy and can be a beacon to foreign Muslim communities that the American model still merits emulation. Thus the very fabric of American

society, which al-Qaeda scorns, may be the best source for an effective counternarrative.

AL-QAEDA'S SECULAR STRATEGY IS NOT BASED ON ISLAM

Embarking on a review of al-Qaeda strategists, I set out to see whether there was a pattern, a discernible political-military strategy, that guides their violent tactics. What became clear is that these strategists tell us more about al-Qaeda than its political-military strategy. These writers provide readers with a history of the modern Middle East as al-Qaeda's leaders see it. They provide a glimpse of what they call "Salafist jihadism" or simply the "jihadist movement" and inform us how this movement is different from other modern Muslim movements. It is revolutionary. Reading these strategists' works also reveals what they do not want the West to know. The core of their violent strategy is not Islam but a recast, protracted guerrilla war along Maoist lines and fought using fourth-generation warfare principles, although so far they have not succeeded in obtaining the high-tech weapons of mass destruction that the American students of 4GW contemplated. Al-Qaeda claims to follow "universal laws" of human reason, and al-Qaeda strategists warn against trying to devise strategy and tactics by referring to the traditional texts of Islam that they claim to revere above all else. The strategists cited in this book made disclaimers that their military doctrine was not based on shari'ah. Instead, they claimed their strategy was not incompatible with shari'ah. I am not arguing that a religious movement cannot legitimately use a secular strategy to achieve its political-military goals, but I have demonstrated that the strategy chosen by al-Qaeda flies in the face of the ordinary Muslim sense of morality or even the common understanding of classic jihad. In their writings, Al-Qaeda strategists demonstrate that they see this problem with perfect clarity.

Reading these strategists, all of whom were close to Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, one can discern that they

consider the al-Qaeda movement to be opposed by everyone outside their circle of conspirators, all governments, competent Muslim religious authorities, and the majority of the Muslim population. They see one of their primary goals as uniting the Muslims of the world behind their cause. The history of their attempts to do that since September 11, 2001, has been a history of failure. The Arab Spring proceeded without them, and the majority of the population within countries where they have attempted jihad have opposed them. Ironically, al-Qaeda's writings are a gold mine for opposition research.

Another lesson we learn from these strategists is that they do not accept that they are in a losing battle. Their concept of war requires patience and adaptability, they do not compromise, and they are capable of planning for years. They study the United States and modern thought carefully to find ways to defeat America. I have suggested that one way to defeat al-Qaeda and their successors is to take them seriously enough to study the vast corpus of literature that remains to be studied beyond the representative texts selected for this book. The United States and its allies have won this round of the close battle, but we have not defeated al-Qaeda's ideology and strategy yet. We have learned that they wait on the margins of the world to move out against us when we are not looking. They have grown quickly in the past and could grow quickly in the future if circumstances allow and if the United States does not engage in a deep-battle strategy to match the close battle, at which our forces have become so adept. Counterterrorism strategy has remained remarkably stable since 9/11 despite the change at the top of the American government. We need to continue that strategy.

Many commentators believe the United States needs to change its military approach to regional insurgency because of the economic burden and the strain it puts on the troops themselves. Some military analysts believe

our counterinsurgency strategy has become another word for extended occupations by our military forces, roles for which they were not and should not be designed. Others believe that American forces should remain in Afghanistan until the risk of a Taliban return is reduced dramatically. The American military is the most lethal instrument of power projection the world has ever known. It is designed to defeat conventional military forces that pose potential existential threats to our homeland or to our vital national interests overseas. Al-Qaeda's planners feared and hated American air power, for which they have no counter. American air power and strategic use of Special Forces continue to be the backbone of our counterterrorism strategy. Whatever purpose they serve, large deployments of American conventional forces, as we have seen, allow al-Qaeda and its sympathizers to confuse the issue by calling for classic jihad to defend Muslim lands. This does not mean that large deployments should never be used in the Middle East. Conventional forces must always be an option against state actors, and our determination to use them when circumstances warrant will be the best deterrence to future threats. Because we never intend for them to remain indefinitely, conventional forces are not appropriate instruments to use against nonstate actors such as al-Qaeda or other jihadist groups that decide to take up al-Qaeda's mission.

We should not design a strategy simply around al-Qaeda's strategy, but we cannot ignore it, especially when at its core it is so familiar to the United States and a relic of the Cold War in different dress. The best way to thwart al-Qaeda's strategy and prevent a return of a serious threat from a revived organization is to continue our counterterrorism strategy, the close battle, while coordinating it with a new engagement in the battle of ideas, which so far has been waged mostly by al-Qaeda. American officials and the private sector can name the enemy and describe it in detail without claiming to interpret Islam or prescribe what Islamic orientation Muslims should adopt. The West can use al-Qaeda's

own words to describe them as revolutionaries that studied twentieth-century insurgent strategists to find support for their own political objectives. And, by taking action to support the rights of those in the Arab Spring searching for jobs, dignity, and democracy, the United States can regain its former prestige by returning to its traditional role in the region. The task is not simple. The West needs to work hard on understanding the phenomenon called al-Qaeda and its various offshoots that are sure to emerge, just as we labored to understand the enemy during the Cold War. Our task is eased somewhat when we realize that at its core al-Qaeda's political-military strategy owes much to America's adversaries in the Cold War, a strategy we have defeated before. We should begin with this understanding and proceed to develop a counternarrative that likewise points out the shortfalls of our new enemies and the advantages of the American model. Most of all, we need to move to the next stage in our own strategy, one that would support the deep battle and not declare victory or close the books and our minds—until the next time.

Appendix 1

Translation of “Revolutionary Wars”

Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi

No date of publication—probably late 1990s

INTRODUCTION

This century [the twentieth] has witnessed devastating war between the Islamic movement and its enemies over [the movement's] serious attempt to tip the scales of power to benefit the truth and its people. In response, the enemies of Islam have tried to monopolize all sources of power, along with its theoretical and practical foundations. [This is] a desperate attempt to prevent the young men of Islam from developing a new military spirit and from absorbing historical lessons to invent new military strategies and methods to take their enemies by surprise. For this reason, I have chosen this article as the beginning of a series of articles aimed at promoting the spread of a military culture in the ranks of the Islamic movement.

I began with *Revolutionary Wars* for several reasons:

1. Because they are a model for war of the weak against the strong, offering a good chance of victory for the weak
2. Because they enjoy a reasonable degree of coverage in theoretical literature
3. Because the jihadist movement has often adopted some methods from revolutionary warfare without a full grasp of the dimensions and foundations for these kinds of wars

In this context, I raise the subject of revolutionary war as a platform for a fruitful strategic discussion, with the knowledge that past methods of war by revolutionaries have undergone significant development [over time], which must be taken into consideration.

1. THE DEFINITION OF REVOLUTION AND REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Revolution means “a comprehensive and fundamental change to the political order, social structure, economic ownership, and the standing social order.”

Revolution also means the attempt of a nongovernmental group to take control of the government in order to establish a new political, social, and economic structure.

In this article, we shall use a number of terms such as “rebellion” and “revolutionary war.” They are terms used to describe a special kind of revolutionary movement that involves a struggle combining unconventional military tactics, political operations, and psychological warfare leading to the establishment of a new ideological regime or political structure.

On the other hand, the term “guerrilla war” has a narrower meaning. This term indicates a special kind of military operations or semimilitary operations carried out by local unconventional forces (for the most part but not always) in order to achieve a revolutionary goal.

The difference between a war undertaken by a conventional army and one undertaken by revolutionaries is that a conventional army is focused on dominance of land, sea, and air, whereas the revolutionary army is focused on gains in political, social, economic, and cultural domains, which can have greater weight in the scale of victory than territorial control.

2. THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF REVOLUTION

Echoing what the prominent strategist Clausewitz said centuries ago, Mao Tse-tung focused in his writings

about revolutionary war on the fundamental relationship between war and politics, a relationship that subordinates military operations to political leadership. In this context, Mao said: "War cannot diverge for one instant from politics." And he added: "Politics is war in its essence but without blood."¹

But it appears that revolutionary forces have recourse to methods other than good cooperation [with the general public] to push the people into the arms of the revolution. Terrorism has been widely used for this, although revolutionary literature does not promote its use for clear propaganda reasons.

In this context, terrorism has been used to increase a [revolutionary] organization's prestige and to destroy the morale of a government, as well as to polarize society and force the undecided to obey [the revolutionaries] because the government cannot protect them. But if terrorism becomes extreme, it has the opposite effect. This is what occurred in Greece in 1947 when the revolutionary leaders went too far in using terrorism [in the countryside], causing one-half million people to flee to the cities. Thus, the revolutionaries were unmasked, which was among the causes of their defeat. Therefore, some theorists say that in order [for revolutionaries] to use terrorism advantageously, the people must view them as striving for long-awaited justice and must believe that it [terrorism] is the only way to loosen the government's iron grip on the people.² To this Mao added: "All operations carried out by the revolutionary army, and especially military operations, must be executed for political goals." This focus, Mao insists, is of fundamental importance in order to keep the reins of power in the hands of the political leaders. This principle itself is the position taken in most of [Mao's] book; indeed, it is the main subject of revolutionary theory.

In practice, we find that most successful revolutionary experiences need active help from a political organization, which even though it exists outside the chain [of command] is still loyal to the revolutionary

cause. This is observed to be the case in revolutionary movements in rural areas as well. Especially in the first stage [of guerrilla war] they seek to establish branches in the cities to achieve the goals of the revolutionaries, whether they relate to logistics, politics, or public information or even the defense of prisoners before the courts and support of their families. But this principle (i.e., a dual organization in which the military is separated from the political, which is in charge) does not enjoy a consensus among revolutionary theorists, especially among the Latin Americans, who prefer to combine both in one organization. This is the school of Régis Debray and Che Guevara and those who follow the example of the Cuban experience, which joined political and military authority in one man, Fidel Castro.

In any case, the relationship between the political organization and the military according to most theorists and practitioners of revolutionary war may be summed up as this: the first political goal of a revolutionary organization is to win the people to the side of the revolutionary forces, because the people are the key to the whole struggle. Without the agreement and support of the people, the revolutionary movement will be no more than a gang of criminals—and more to the point, they will not survive for long.

Therefore, revolutionary goals range from, at a minimum, alienating the people from the existing regime to ideally winning the people over completely to the side of revolutionaries. When this goal is achieved, guerrilla forces can gain access to information, food, shelter, and other foundational elements on which to build a successful revolutionary campaign. For this reason, Mao often repeated “guerrilla forces must be in the midst of the people like a fish in water,” and because of this Mao emphasized [the importance of] good cooperation with the people. In his articles “The [Three] Rules of Discipline” and “The Eight Factors for Attention,” for example, Mao ordered his forces to pay for what they took from local communities, to help them solve local

problems, and [to avoid] encroaching on [agricultural] fields and having illicit sex with the women of the region.

Closely related to the struggle for the people's loyalty is the drive of revolutionary organizations to compete with rulers in the political field in every way possible. One of the most important areas of conflict is the legitimacy of governmental institutions. Most revolutionary movements spend some time setting up not only a local administration but also parallel governmental institutions, which act as a pivot point in the struggle for the people's loyalty. These alternative institutions are required to give a degree of legitimacy to the revolutionary army while at the same time breaking the government's monopoly on legitimacy. Thus, the Chinese "people's war" (for example) witnessed the establishment of a state within a state in regions controlled by the communist forces in China

3. THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF REVOLUTION

In a revolution, military force plays a secondary role since the decisive factor is popular support, which at the same time is the principal goal and decisive means.³ Military force is designed primarily to bring about public support, which acts as a force multiplier. Thus, the flood of information, ability to move, freedom of logistics, and the element of surprise constitute the foundations of guerrilla warfare, and all of these foundations depend to a great degree on the sympathy and support of the people. Thus, a close political connection with the people permits the acquisition of vital information about enemy planning and movement, which allows guerrilla forces to choose the most appropriate time to attack and most appropriate time to withdraw to avoid the enemy's blows. So it was that all the movements of the French forces were exposed during the Vietnam War because of the difficulty of movement at night; whereas in Cuba, Castro states, "We always knew about the movements of the government's soldiers, but they did not know our situation at all." Just as popular support provides the revolutionaries food, shelter, transportation, and

assistance in various fields, it facilitates the most important component of guerrilla war: the ability to move. When one adds to this a good knowledge of the terrain and light arms and equipment, guerrillas can make sport of the enemy's plans by choosing the time and place for a surprise attack and then quickly withdrawing before the enemy can muster reinforcements.

In this regard, General Giap (one of the most prominent revolutionary leaders of Vietnam during two wars) defined the principles of guerrilla war. It is a type of warfare in which the weak side, with poor equipment, takes refuge among the masses to fight against a powerful enemy, which possesses superior equipment and technology. This is the way the revolution engages in combat. Guerrilla war is based on a heroic spirit that leads to victory over advanced weapons by avoiding enemy units when they are strong and attacking them when they are weak, massing guerrilla forces at one time and dispersing them at another, and annihilating the enemy at other times. Because they are in the midst of a sea of enemies, guerrilla forces are designed to engage the enemy in combat wherever they can and escape afterward whenever the opportunity presents itself. This weakens enemy morale and exhausts its troops.⁴

Because guerrilla war is a war of the weak against the strong, victory in this war takes time. This is the character of all revolutionary wars because they are wars of attrition. The seeds of revolution require a long time before they bear fruit, but the fruit can appear suddenly, and then you find revolutionaries everywhere. For the sake of victory, forces must be preserved by avoiding any direct confrontation and by concentrating on the principle of hit and run, the principle of survival. The intention behind this is to make it possible for the guerrilla forces to return to fight another time. So, let it be known that the goal of guerrilla war is not to end the war quickly; rather, it is to extend its life.

So Mao, for example, had a fundamental problem: how to link control over territory with the period of time

remaining for the war.⁵ Therefore, in the first stages of the revolutionary war in China, he used the vast expanses of China to establish bases in remote areas. Then, with the passage of time, when his forces became stronger, he extended his territorial control, especially in the countryside around the cities.

The same stratagem was repeated in Cuba, but because of the small size of the island and the difference in topography, the leadership of the Cuban Revolution gave little priority to the establishment of permanent bases, instead giving utmost priority to mobility. This change in strategy occurred because the revolutionaries' base camps were destroyed in the first days of the Revolution in 1957. Therefore, the guerrilla forces constantly moved from place to place to evade the enemy, continually monitor it, and constantly surprise it. Permanent bases were not established until the final strokes of the Cuban Revolution.

In any case, whatever the environment of the conflict and the method chosen to develop it, most revolutionary theorists agree that most revolutionary wars may be divided into three strategic stages.

The first of these stages is the stage of planning and deliberation, during which the revolutionaries build the foundation of a revolutionary organization by establishing and expanding a political infrastructure to win the sympathy of the people and prepare for the coming war. [During this stage] they also carry out small attacks to obtain weapons and make their presence known.

In the second phase, the stage of equilibrium, the revolutionaries build out their cellular structure while using guerrilla tactics to weaken the enemy and begin to tip the balance of power in favor of the revolutionaries.

Next comes the third phase, in which the revolutionary forces are hardened to a level termed "strategic counteroffensive," which means that they can counterattack the enemy on a large scale and function as a conventional army would, using all weapons [of a

conventional army] and engaging successfully in conventional battles.

But the student of history will discover that theory is different from reality. Despite the theory stating that there are three phases in revolutionary war, this was the case in only three instances: the Chinese civil war, the second Vietnam War (which ended in 1975), and Nicaragua, when the communists took power in 1979. Even in the first Vietnam War and the important victory won by General Giap in the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, although this was an overwhelming psychological victory, it did not eliminate the French Army and consequently did not resolve the war as the theorists of revolutionary war intended. The same thing occurred in the Algerian war of liberation, and it is the experience of Cyprus, where the revolutionaries managed to win but not through military victory. Instead, they won by making the enemy pay a heavy economic and political price for continuing the war.⁶

To summarize: armed operations may achieve clear military goals, such as seizing weapons and inflicting losses on the enemy, but military action overall remains subordinate and complementary to the political mission in revolutionary wars. Thus, most revolutionary theorists agree that local military victories have no value unless they help the revolutionaries weaken the morale of the regime and increase political pressure by increasing popular discontent while the war is raging.

4. THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSION TO REVOLUTION

To build popular support for the revolution and to put into motion what Marighella called “the climate of collapse,” revolutionaries must fuel the conflict with the enemy in the social and economic fields. This is done first by exposing the oppressive and corrupt nature of the existing regime and then by building the desirable social and economic alternatives in the areas under revolutionary control. So, in this way, the conflict in the

social and economic fields may be described as a corrupt negative versus a positive response.

Concerning the negative (i.e., the attack on corruption, and the criticism on which it is based), revolutionaries seek to gain popular support by exploiting various problems mostly stemming from economic and social oppression. Thus, most revolutionary theorists agree that injustice must exist for the revolution to succeed. They disagree, however, on the matter of whether injustice is a prerequisite for revolutionary activity (the opinion of Mao) or [whether it can be] fomented in the course of the revolution (the opinion of Guevara). But even the latter held that some specific minimal conditions are necessary to establish a revolution's first stronghold and lead to its continuation and [ultimate] success.⁷ In this regard, although questions may be raised about the existence or absence of minimum conditions to establish a revolution in a given country, there is no ultimate answer except to study the society in which revolutionary action is proposed. Thus Mao and Giap grant the utmost importance in their writings to analyzing the economic, social, and political structure of a society to exploit existing contradictions and establish alternatives in the regions [the revolutionaries] will subsequently control. Moreover, they note that analysis of the economic structure can enable revolutionaries to target for control the most promising economic zones as potential sources of revenue to continue the war. One example of this was Castro's move, during the Cuban Revolution, to take control of the coffee-producing region, thus benefitting from the [income of] state-owned estates and the taxes levied on large-scale agriculturalists.

Similarly, revolutionaries often target economic facilities for attack with the intention of undermining the economic power of their enemies. They therefore target petroleum facilities, ports, and the means of transportation and communication, which form the economic arteries of the state, for attacks designed to

spread conditions of collapse and chaos. Attacks of this type included those of the Irish Republican Army, the German Baader Meinhof group, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Basque ETA group.

5. CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF REVOLUTION

Cultural conflict is deeply bound to the conflict in political, social, and economic fields, for it is a struggle between the system of values prevailing in society and the new system the revolutionaries bring with them. Thus, rebels seek to undermine the government by emphasizing the worst aspects of the existing regime. For example, the revolutionaries in Vietnam focused strongly on corruption, nepotism, exploitation, and moral turpitude, widespread torture, and the lack of equality in the society of South Vietnam. At the same time, the revolutionaries portrayed themselves as good, morally pure, disciplined, and [willing to] sacrifice for their organization, which was operating on a superior ethical plane. Whenever [the rebels] demonstrated the veracity of these claims, they gained undeniable legitimacy. The revolutionaries in Cuba did the same thing. They used all available media to win the cultural and ideological battle, taking ownership of the issue and the message and nullifying their enemies in this arena.

6. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF REVOLUTION

The psychological dimension is considered one of the most important dimensions of the conflict between revolutionaries and their enemies on the field of battle to control the hearts of the people. On the path to achieving victory in this battle, revolutionaries focus powerfully on propaganda theory and practice to defame the existing system and win the people over to the side of the revolution. The importance of the psychological dimension is evident in Mao's emphasis on three things: time, space, and will. According to his theory, the

revolutionary uses space to buy time, and uses time to create will.

To win the psychological battle, one must have an effective strategy in this area, and researchers can find many examples in books on guerrilla war. For example, Marighella emphasizes activating the climate of collapse as a fundamental goal of military operations. This climate, characterized by the slow, gradual breakdown of soldiers' and civilians' loyalty to and identification with the government, eventually paralyzes the enemy and can be exploited by the revolutionary movement.

In Vietnam, psychological warfare was successfully implemented when the revolutionaries were able to spread chaos in the ranks of the enemy. Attracting supporters within the enemy's administrative apparatus was like breaking the only leg left to the ruling regime to stand on—once the other leg, the people, had already been broken, as popular sympathy shifted to the revolutionaries.

Thus, anything the revolutionary movement does must have a psychological goal that can be exploited politically. In this regard, military operations are of the utmost importance in psychological warfare. For this reason, one scholar is of the opinion that in psychological warfare, the combatant is a basic arm of political propaganda, who sows the seeds of revolution wherever he goes, enhancing the military struggle as a means of goading the government. Thus, every battle must expose the weakness of the government army and show the bankruptcy of the ruling regime, which relies on it; as a result, every military battle is a speech designed to increase revolutionary consciousness. An example of this occurred during the Irish Republican Army campaign to win the psychological war by carrying out many attacks on British soil to break British spirits, especially the Brighton bombing in 1985 that aimed to kill British ministers. The Irish Republican Army also responded with the utmost violence to undermine the climate of

confidence in the government's ranks, whenever the British government spoke about progress in the war.

7. THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF REVOLUTION

In parallel with the effort to win the affection of the people, revolutionaries always seek international support for their cause by using skills in political propaganda beyond their borders, reviling both the local government and the foreign governments that support it. The revolutionaries portray themselves as going to war as David (peace be upon him) entered battle against Goliath, i.e., a small movement fighting for a noble cause against an enemy massive in size and hugely corrupt. Proceeding in this way will engender sympathy and the desire for justice on the part of other peoples. The best example of this is the revolutionary movement in Vietnam, which General Giap documented in his book, *People's War People's Army*, when he stated that the revolutionary movement must rally international public opinion to its side, especially public opinion in the [foreign] enemy state.

Actually, the revolutionary movement in Vietnam was not able to obtain direct support from American public opinion, but it pushed them to question the nature of the war and its justification. This in itself was an important achievement because of the impact it had on the morale of the both the government leadership and soldiers. The international dimension demonstrated its importance in the unlimited support received by revolutionary movements from socialist and communist states, even though this support did not always guarantee revolutionary success. External support for China and Cuba was negligible until after the rebels declared victory and established new regimes. Indeed, foreign funding may be a cause of defeat if revolutionaries depend completely on foreign assistance and it is suddenly cut off, as happened in Greece in 1948.

8. CONCLUSION

Revolutionary wars have proliferated in this century because of many political, social, and economic abuses as well as personal and objective factors that helped fuel popular anger against ruling regimes. Revolutionary wars have had mixed results. In contrast to China, Vietnam, Indo-China, Algeria, Cuba, and Nicaragua, where revolutionaries were victorious, the outcome for revolutionaries in Greece, Peru, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Bolivia was defeat. This occurred for a number of reasons, such as the lack of suitable conditions for revolution, the inability to adapt theories of warfare to actual conditions on the ground, or the failure to confront counterrevolutionary plans in a timely or appropriate manner, etc.

Jihadist movements have used many of the methods of revolutionary wars against indigenous infidels and apostate enemies. They have won some of these trials and failed in others for a number of reasons [related to] divine law, as well as universal causes. Among these universal causes [of failure] is imitating the military theory of revolutionary wars without adapting it to the time and place and similarly without considering the other dimensions [of revolutionary war], which, along with the military dimension, must form a coordinated effort.

I hope Allah grants me success in the future to write an article comparing jihadist wars and revolutionary wars to define the point of error and avoid it in the coming times, for the struggle with infidelity is long, and jihad lasts till judgment day.

Allah supports the intention and guides along the path.

Appendix 2

Translation of “Fourth-Generation Warfare”

Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi

January 28, 2002

It is absurd these days the extent to which psychological defeatism has penetrated the heart of this community [ummah]. It is even more perplexing that [Islamic] scholars were among the first to exhibit this malady, when it is incumbent upon the likes of them to defend this community so truth may prevail and falsehoods stifled. In this regard, one of these specimens spoke in an interview on one of the satellite channels about the current American attack. When he began to justify withholding support from the mujahedeen, of all the falsehoods, one caught my attention: his saying that there is no parity between the power of the mujahedeen and that of America and its allies, therefore no jihad and no support for it. The matter is decided in advance in favor of America! This talk reflects the speaker's utter ignorance concerning Islamic law, history, and current Western military analysis, as will be clear in what follows.

For years we have all been following the news and images of the children of the Palestinian Intifada as they threw stones and Molotov cocktails at Zionist soldiers equipped with the latest modern military technology. Despite the fact that wounds proliferated in the ranks of the Palestinians, their resolve was not broken at all—to the contrary! The jihadist movements in Palestine in particular increased their determination [to carry out] operations that increased in numbers and quality. Truly, the images and sights that assaulted us were examples

of courage and determination. But there are other implications to these pictures. In 1989, some American military experts caught a glimpse of the setting in of a radical change in the shape of warfare and how to manage it. Some American military experts saw that it would be the form of most wars of the twenty-first century.¹ Those experts named this form [of warfare] “fourth-generation warfare,” whereas others named it “asymmetrical warfare.”

It is well known among military historians that the wars in the postindustrial era have witnessed three fundamental developments. The first generation of these wars relied on a large number of soldiers formed up in ranks and armed with primitive guns. The second generation emerged in the period between the American Civil War (1861–1865) and World War I and relied on attrition of the enemy’s economy and destroying a great number of its troops by using massed firepower first from rifles and later from automatic weapons. The third-generation warfare represented a comprehensive change in tactics, in which the German Army excelled during World War II.² These tactics took the shape of flanking movements against the enemy using a variety of tanks and airplanes to attack the rear instead of the frontal assault used in the trench warfare of World War I.

Experts emphasize that fourth-generation warfare is a new kind of war in which combat, in their concept, will be dispersed to a greatest extent so that the theater of war will include [many] communities. Military goals will not be confined to destroying conventional armies but also include the destruction of popular support for the combatants in the enemy’s society. In their article,³ these experts explained further “the news bulletin will become much more lethal than a number of armored brigades.” They also mentioned “the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the point of having no definable battlefields or fronts at all.”

Other Western strategists⁴ argued that the new warfare would rely from the point of view of strategy on

influencing the psychology and the mind of the enemy's planners not through military means alone but also (as was previously the case) by using all available contemporary media and information networks to influence public opinion and beyond that the ruling elite. Tactically, these [Western strategists] go on to say that fourth-generation wars will be small-scale wars fought in different regions around the world against an enemy [who is] like a ghost that appears then disappears. This war, although it will use the tactics and techniques left over from the previous generation, will span the full spectrum, the political, the social, the economic, and the military; and will be fought between parties at the international, national, regional, and tribal—indeed organizational levels as well.

This new kind of war will pose many difficulties for the Western military machine, and it is expected that these armies will change their priorities. This outlook and change did not arise in a vacuum. Oh, if only the quivering cowards knew this: that fourth-generation wars have actually occurred and demonstrated the superiority of the theoretically weak. Indeed, in many cases nation-states have been defeated by nations without states. Here we must be aware of an important note: the Islamic community has had the greatest number of victories in a short period, which has not been witnessed since the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate. These victories have occurred during the last twenty years against the best armies in the world in terms of weaponry, training, and experience (the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, America in Somalia, Russia in Chechnya, and the Zionist Entity in South Lebanon) and in a variety of theaters (mountains, deserts, hills, and cities). The mujahedeen were victorious in Afghanistan against the second most powerful force in the world and forced it to withdraw its army in 1988 and then defeated its client regime three years after that. Similarly, a Somali clan humiliated America and forced it to withdraw its forces from Somalia. Shortly after that, the Chechen mujahedeen humiliated the Russian bear in the first war [1994–1996]

and drove it out defeated and routed. Then the Lebanese Resistance [Hezbollah] did not hesitate to drive the Zionist army out of South Lebanon. It is true that most of these previous victories were not followed by the installation of the victorious, but this is not the subject of our study. The intention of the article is pure military research, because the focus is the supposed lack of parity between American power and the power of the mujahedeen, which means in the reckoning of the defeatists the lack of jihadist resistance and victory.

The vast armies mentioned above did not benefit from the technology, which was sufficient to destroy the earth many times over by means of their nuclear, chemical, and biological arsenals. Despite that, the mujahedeen demonstrated their superiority in fourth-generation wars [fought] with light weapons alone, for they are part of the people and hide among the masses. It is a strategy that has overcome the superiority of advanced weapons designed for open and clearly defined spaces. Concerning this trend, Michael Vickers emphasized, "There are many of our capabilities that are not suitable for this kind of war."⁵

In terms of numbers this is definitely what happened. The Red Army deployed more than 100,000 troops [to Afghanistan] at the end of 1979. There was no resistance to speak of in the beginning. Even when the number of mujahedeen reached its peak in 1985, the balance of power⁶ favored the Soviet Army and its clients by a ratio of 5 to 2. In Somalia it was easier, for the Americans invaded the region with 40,000 troops and withdrew from the region without a great deal of trouble after light resistance by combatants that under the best conditions never exceeded 2,000, i.e., the balance of power favored the American army and its allies by a ratio of 20 to 1. As for the Chechen war (1994–1996), Chechen victory came after the Russians invaded the land of Chechnya with 100,000 troops, while the Chechen resistance never exceeded 13,000 at best, i.e., a numerical balance of power in favor of the Russians of

7.7 to 1. Indeed, in a period when the Russian Army inflicted a terrible siege on Grozny with an Army numbering 50,000, the Chechen mujahedeen, with combat formations not exceeding 3,000, managed in 1995 not only to break the siege but also to mount a bold counterattack on the encircling army's rear forcing the Russians to withdraw with heavy losses.⁷ The First Chechen War thus clearly demonstrated the performance of the [jihadist] soldiers and their courage in the field, whatever the difficulty of the key factors that determined the outcome of the battle.⁸ Similarly, military and media savvy⁹ and broad knowledge of the internal workings of the Russian army showed that the Chechens knew just how to take advantage of the situation.¹⁰ Thus, it is clear that there are precedents for great powers and big powers to taste catastrophic defeat at the hands of jihadist military formations despite the great disparity between the capabilities of the two sides. This shows that the quivering coward mentioned above has been talking nonsense.

Some may object that the previous wars all brought together coherent national groups against invading armies, and therefore what was argued above is not true in the case of al-Qaeda, which is in combat in a foreign land and, in most cases, a hostile environment. We answer this objection first that al-Qaeda is fighting alongside the Taliban, who are native to the country. Second, and from the beginning, al-Qaeda's mujahedeen proved that they had gone beyond the traditional partisan cells. This is exactly what made the Americans take revenge because they (al-Qaeda) escaped a game that the Americans had mastered—indeed they made the rules. Al-Qaeda has glory enough because the raid on September 11 destroyed the pillars of American strategic defense, which is something neither the former Soviet Union nor any other enemy state managed to do. These pillars are:

1. Early warning
2. Preemptive attack, and

3. The principle of deterrence.¹¹

In respect to the first pillar, early warning, with the raid of September al-Qaeda entered the history of the few successful surprise attacks. [These include] Japan's attack on America's Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Nazi surprise attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the [Egyptian] crossing the Zionist Bar Lev Line in 1973. But [the raid of September 11] exceeded these other attacks in the pain [it caused] because it forced America to prepare all members of its society psychologically and practically for all contingencies. That is an exorbitant price economically and psychologically, especially for a society that had not been exposed to the effects of war since the American Civil War (1861–1865). If the American military, which is obliged to be fully prepared, was [still] subjected to the incident of the [USS] destroyer *Cole*, then the preparation of the entire society to face "terrorist" attacks would appear to be unobtainable.

As for what pertains to preemptive attack, it is the second pillar of American strategic defense and was similarly shaken for it follows from the first pillar and is contingent upon what occurs to it. Even if we posit that early warning occurred in a timely fashion, it is extremely difficult to mount any effective preemptive strike against an organization, which maneuvers and moves quickly and has no permanent headquarters.

As for what pertains to the third pillar, deterrence, it is a principle that fails utterly against a people who do not covet life but eagerly seek martyrdom instead. The principle of deterrence is based on the existence of two sides seeking survival and the continuation of their interests. This matter succeeds between states, but it is not successful with an organization without a fixed headquarters or capital in Western banks and that does not depend on assistance from states. Consequently, it [the organization] possesses freedom of decision and is primarily seeking a confrontation. How can someone be

deterred when they hold death as their highest aspiration?

In addition to the destruction of these pillars, al-Qaeda was the cause of the greatest psychological defeat of Americans in their history. The best way to cause psychological defeat, as one of the Western strategists¹² explained, is to strike in a place where the enemy feels comfortable and safe. And this is exactly what the mujahedeen did in New York.

It is clear, then, that the asymmetry between America and the mujahedeen, which the trembling cowards discuss, is exactly what is appropriate [to confront] the Western military machine in general and the American [military] in particular. This comes at a time when they [the Americans] are confounded by fourth-generation warfare—which benefits the mujahedeen vanguard—especially when the Islamic peoples have launched a new jihad and when these people have nothing left to lose in light of the humiliation and degradation to which they are exposed every day, and when the Americans and the West have already understood the nature of the new challenge and acknowledged the difficulty of the task facing them at the same time, [they understand] that there must be a comprehensive change in training, combat doctrine, and weapons in addition to changing the way of thinking about national security.

Similarly, the Islamic movements must comprehend the rules of fourth-generation warfare in the face of general and overwhelming Crusader attacks, so that strategic thinking is on the mark and military readiness is sufficient. Emphasis on the *call* (*da'wah*), mobilization of public support, and political mobilization of the people must be increased. In addition to being required by the shari'ah, this [approach] has become an integral part of winning fourth-generation war. Strategists of old, such as Clausewitz¹³ and Mao Zedong, referred to this concept. Perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon is the Intifada, which eliminated the huge superiority of the Zionist army over the Muslim Palestinian people.

The Islamic movements must give more space to media activity—a serious and targeted propaganda—because this exposed front is one in which the Americans and their lackeys have made conspicuous gains to the point that now, after silencing or encompassing every media voice, opposing or neutral, America wishes to destroy the great psychological achievements the mujahedeen gained through military action, and [to destroy] what accrued from the reverberation of these acts of heroism in terms of positive impact of sympathy and victory in the Islamic world.

We ask Allah to silence the bleating of the quivering cowards and send to this community a new generation of preachers and scholars at the level of the challenges of fourth-generation warfare.

Notes

Introduction

1. This probably refers to the plot to explode commercial airplanes between London and North America, which was disrupted by British authorities in August 2006.

2. Scott Helfstein, Nassir Abdullah, and Muhammad al-Obaid, "Deadly Vanguard: A Study of Al-Qa'ida's Violence Against Muslims," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Occasional Paper Series* (December 2009), <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/deadly-vanguards-a-study-of-al-qaidas-violence-against-muslims>.

3. See Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 244–266.

4. See Brynjar Lia, "Destructive Doctrinarians: Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Salafi Current," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 281–300. Al-Suri argues that Salafist purists within the jihadist movement were a hindrance to jihadist goals by excluding many Muslims that might otherwise be allies or members.

5. Fourth-generation warfare is a borderless, stateless guerrilla warfare that aims at exhausting the enemy's political will rather than defeating the enemy on the battlefield.

6. Michael W. S. Ryan, "The Salafist Challenge to Al-Qaeda's Jihad," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 44 (December 2, 2010), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37236.

7. William S. Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare," *Antiwar.com* (January 15, 2004), <http://antiwar.com/lind/index.php?articleid=1702>. Lind also coauthored the original article found in Afghanistan: William S. Lind et al., "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 1989): 22–27; published simultaneously in *Military Review* (October 1989): 3–11, <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p124201coll1/id/506/rec/2>.

8. Thomas Hegghammer and Brynjar Lia, "Jihadi Strategic Studies: The Alleged al-Qaeda Policy Study Preceding the Madrid Bombings," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (September/October 2004): 355–375.

9. See Michael W. S. Ryan, "After Bin Laden: Al-Qaeda Strategy in Yemen," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 20 (May 20, 2011), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37949.

10. For an analysis of a prominent jihadist website, www.tawhed.ws, see William McCants, ed., *Militant Ideology Atlas Research Compendium*,

Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (November 2006), <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/militant-ideology-atlas>.

11. See “Al-Kitab Aladhi Rasama al-Tariq ila Tawahhush fi Adabiyat al-Irhab” (The book that charted the course to savagery), London: *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* (Arabic edition), June 26, 2008. See also Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarah al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (The administration of savagery: the most dangerous phase through which the ummah will pass) (n.p. [presumably Peshawar]: Markaz al-Dirasat wa al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah, December 2, 2010), <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr>.

12. See [chapter 5](#). For the importance of al-Suri to global jihad, see Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

13. Examples of groups whose leaders swore allegiance to al-Qaeda include Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s group in Iraq, Tawhid w’ al-Jihad (2004), and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), whose allegiance to al-Qaeda was formally approved by Ayman al-Zawahiri on September 11, 2006.

14. Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 81.

15. “Afghan Arabs” is a term used to refer to non-Afghan Muslims who traveled to Afghanistan to fight in the various wars there, beginning with the 1979 Soviet invasion. Although Arabs were the most prominent and famous of these fighters, the term was applied loosely to non-Arabs as well. It is used in Arabic language sources as well as the English-language press.

16. J-5 is the designation of the strategic plans and policy division serving the American Joint Chiefs of Staff.

1. The Historical Roots of Al-QaEda’s Ideology

1. Sykes-Picot is the post–World War I agreement between England and France that divided the central Muslim lands of the shattered Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence.

2. Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4–5. “Salafi” is a commonly used alternative to “Salafist.”

3. Quintan Wiktorowicz, “A Genealogy of Radical Islam,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 2 (2005): 75–97.

4. Following the sentence quoted from Thomas Hegghammer’s book cited above, the author states: “This is not to say that the terms Salafism or Wahhabism should be discarded, only that they are more useful for analyzing theological discourse than political behavior.”

5. Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” in *Global Salafism, Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 51. I have translated *manhaj* in the present book as “program” or “method.”

6. The version of Islam practiced by the Sunni Muslim communities in Saudi Arabia is sometimes referred to as “Wahhabism.” This term is not used in the present book to characterize al-Qaeda’s ideology, as they do not use it. Saudi religious authorities generally do not accept the term as a valid

descriptor, either. Madawi Al-Rashid uses its transliterated Arabic form in her closely argued study of Saudi intellectual discourse to distinguish Wahhabism from other forms of Salafism. See Madawi Al-Rashid, *Contesting the Saudi State: Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). It is derived from the name of the great religious reformer Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (b. 1703/4). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was himself a Salafist and follower of the fourteenth-century religious scholar Ibn Taymiyyah, who also inspired Egyptian Salafists.

7. The word *al-qaeda* in Arabic means “the base.” Abdel Bari Atwan writes that the term “base” is derived from the database of possible mujahedeen that Osama Bin Laden established in 1988 that became the basis for the international jihadist network that he and his organization set up. See Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 44.

8. Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda’s major role against the Soviet Union was to support the Afghan tribesman who fought Soviet forces successfully with American, Pakistani, and Saudi Arabian assistance. The major win for Bin Laden in Afghanistan was propaganda, the portrayal of himself as a valiant, independent Muslim warrior.

9. Quoted in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 157.

10. See [chapter 4](#) for Abu Bakr Naji’s view of America’s “deceptive media halo.”

11. The 1973 war, begun in a surprise attack on Yom Kippur, saw the Egyptian forces move into the Sinai, something many thought they could not accomplish. Sadat was able to keep the Sinai in the negotiations, but at the price of heavy casualties on the Egyptian side. Sadat’s intentions in this war have been subject to debate, but he most likely achieved his limited goals. In the end, a weary Egyptian public felt they had suffered enough and had from their perspective won the war. A lesser man than Sadat might have avoided traveling to Jerusalem and making peace at Camp David, possibly thereby avoiding his own assassination.

12. Sufis are devoted to recapturing the essence of the original prophecy through prayer, meditation, and other spiritual exercises including music and dance. Sufis have often been quietist and withdrawn but have also been revolutionary and violent during their long history. They organize into brotherhoods under spiritual leaders and at the time of Abduh in Egypt were devoted to pietism.

13. This rationalist core is clearly evident in the writings of al-Qaeda’s strategists, such as Abu Bakr Naji, who claims to be basing his thought on the rules of pure human reason and universal laws. Naji would not find much else to agree with in the thinking of the urbane Muhammad Abduh. “Salafists” in Egypt, especially after the Arab Spring, refers to the more conservative rivals of the Muslim Brotherhood.

14. The Muslim Brotherhood is an inclusive Islamist organization. It has strong Salafist currents within its members, but it should not be considered a Salafist organization without qualification.

15. Hassan Al-Banna, *Book of Jihad* (*Kitab al-Jihad* translated into English), in *Milestones* (*Ma’alim fi’l-tareeq*), ed. A. B. al-Mehri (Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006), appendix VII, 217–240. The

cited text is on 220; the author provides numerous quotations from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet (hadith) that emphasize jihad as combat.

16. The noun "jihad" is defined in the standard student's dictionary, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th ed. (1979) as "fight, battle; jihad, holy war (fighting against the infidels, as a religious duty)."

17. The traditions of the Prophet are referred to as *hadith* or sometimes by its Arabic plural *ahadith*.

18. Books of hadith are widely available in English translation. The example cited here is: Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, trans., *Sahih Muslim* (Lahore: Hafeez, 1976).

19. Although Bin Laden does not refer to Qutb, as we shall see in the following pages, al-Qaeda strategists refer to him regularly, and his words are featured in abundance on jihadist websites.

20. Taken from *America in an Arab Mirror: Images of America in Arabic Travel Literature*, trans. Tarek Masoud and Ammar Fakeeh (Kashf ul Shubuhah Publications), <http://www.tawhed.net/a.php?a=saydqutb>.

21. See Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 9–37; and John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

22. Qutb claimed that weapons purchases and paramilitary training were defensive, in anticipation of a government attack. John Calvert points out that Qutb never advocated in his writings "a Leninist-style coup." See Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 259. At the same time, Qutb's arguments that the jihad of the pen and the jihad of the tongue must precede the jihad of the sword can be seen as identical to what al-Qaeda's strategists such as Abu Bakr Naji (see [chapter 4](#)) argue in other words. Al-Zawahiri came to understand that his youthful call for a coup was mistaken because the people must be educated (i.e., radicalized) before violent jihad can succeed. Both Qutb and al-Zawahiri consider conflict between jihadists and the Muslim governments of the Middle East to be inevitable.

23. My analysis and translations are based on a download of the Arabic text: Sayyid Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones along the path), from a prominent online library sympathetic to al-Qaeda, Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad. See <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=r5kf57rg>. This book is hereafter cited as *Milestones/Arabic*. This version carries no publication data beyond that of the website publisher.

24. *Milestones/Arabic* 2; I did not translate the entire phrase: "healthy development of human life under their shade (or protection)." The metaphor would be recognized by readers of Qutb's Arabic: the word for shade or protection is the same as the word for "shade" in the title of Qutb's commentary on the Holy Qur'an. The unstated implication is that the Holy Qur'an does provide the "values" that make human life worthwhile and healthy. In Qutb's view, neither the West of the United States nor the East of the Soviet Union could offer mankind these values because both systems are based on materialism, not spiritual values.

25. *Milestones/Arabic*, 3.

26. The Turkish caliphate had been destroyed by the secular forces of Atatürk's political movement, but Sayyid Qutb does not consider the Turkish caliphate to be valid either, as he wrote that there had not been a true Muslim community for some centuries.

27. To bolster his claims about the nature of Christians and Jews, Qutb selectively picks verses from the Holy Qur'an to include Surat al-Tawbah: 30; Surat al-Ma'idah: 63, 64, and others. See *Milestones/Arabic*, 81ff. It is not my purpose to contest Sayyid Qutb's interpretation of Revelation here or elsewhere in his writings other than to point out that his are interpretations and that like all interpretations they are subject to challenge by accredited Muslim religious scholars who may not share revolutionary Salafist sympathies.

28. Here shari'ah does not mean Islamic law but refers to tribal customary law.

29. *Milestones/Arabic*, 18–19.

30. Abul A'ala Maududi, *Jihad in Islam* (Beirut: Holy Koran Publishing House, 1980), 5. Maududi delivered this work as an address at the Town Hall, Lahore, Pakistan, on April 13, 1939.

31. I use the term "revolutionary Salafism" to distinguish this ideology from that of the majority of Salafists who believe in classic defensive jihad but do not intend to change societies by violence in the mode of al-Qaeda. Although Qutb apparently did not believe violence was necessary, he thought it likely in Egypt at least; revolutionary jihadists like al-Qaeda have pushed Qutb's thought to the extreme.

32. *Milestones/Arabic*, 50–74. I prefer to translate the phrase *qital fi sabil Allah* literally. Often, this phrase is translated as "combat for the cause of Allah."

33. *Ibid.*, 58–59; "Orientalists" is a pejorative reference to Western scholars.

34. *Ibid.*, 123–133.

35. *Taghut* is a term used in the Qur'an and means a transgressor, an idol, a demon, or devil, and by extension a tyrant. Jihadists refer to modern Arab leaders as Taghut. For examples, al-Qaeda spokesmen and writers will avoid saying the "President of Egypt" but will tend to use "Taghut" or the "Pharaoh" instead.

36. As we shall see ([chapter 3](#)) one of the leaders of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, successfully sought a fatwa to go on jihad in Afghanistan as a young man, when his parents objected.

37. *Milestones/Arabic*, 149–150.

38. For Qutb's impact on other Salafist ideologues, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, "A Genealogy of Radical Islam," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 2 (2005): 75–97. For more detailed exposition, see Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*.

39. This text was downloaded from <http://www.tawhed.ws> in May 2010 and accessed from <http://www.alkalema.net> on September 2, 2011. Unless noted otherwise, all translations are my own.

40. Faraj, *al-Jihad al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah*, 1; Faraj is also sometime spelled "Farag," in keeping with the pronunciation in Cairene popular

dialect.

41. These fatwas are often referred to as the Mardin fatwas after a town now situated in the eastern part of Turkey. A conference of international jurists and scholars of Islamic law met in Mardin (March 2010) to discuss the applicability of Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwas today. Al-Qaeda's use of the great scholar's fatwas was found to be incorrect. Clearly, al-Qaeda and other violent jihadist groups disagree. See <http://www.mardin-fatwa.com/index.php> for details on the conference's conclusions. See also Michael W. S. Ryan, "New Attention to an Old Fatwa: The Mardin Conference," *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst* (August 2010).

42. One of the participants in the Mardin Conference (see [note 41](#)) was a Saudi authority on hadith, Shaykh Abd al-Wahhab al-Turayri. He argued that Faraj had used a corrupted manuscript of Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwa, which substituted two letters in the verb *yu'ama* (should be treated) to *yuqatil* (should be fought), which would change the meaning of the correct text that non-Muslims "should be treated according to their rights" to the incorrect "should be fought as is their due." Al-Turayri claims his view is based on the Zahiriyah Library manuscript (2757) archived at the Asad Library in Damascus. If al-Turayri's analysis were correct, it would destroy the legitimacy of Faraj's interpretation on his own terms. For details see Shaykh Abd al-Wahhab al-Turayri, "The Mardin Conference—Understanding Ibn Taymiyyah's Fatwa," *Muslim Weekly* (June 29, 2010), <http://muslimmatters.org/2010/06/29/the-mardin-conference—a-detailed-account/>.

43. The word "Jama'ah" is pronounced "Gama'ah" by many Egyptians. Names for groups formed at this time are confusing. For example, the group Faraj, formed in 1979/1980, may be referred to simply as al-Jihad but also as Tanzim al-Jihad, Islamic Jihad, or even Jama'ah al-Jihad. Later, outside Egypt and under al-Zawahiri the name became Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ).

44. Faraj was sympathetic to the Egyptian radical Salafist group Takfir wa al-Hijra (Excommunication and Migration) and its leader Shukri Mustafa, who called for flight before the external and internal enemy. One might say that al-Zawahiri "emigrated" from Egypt after his release from prison, and the concept of emigration to join jihad has been a fundamental principle of al-Qaeda. The name Takfir wa al-Hijra was a journalistic trope for *Jama'ah al-Muslimin* (Society of Muslims). For a summary and analysis of this organization, see Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 70–102.

45. "Colonialism" in this passage refers to the state of Israel as well as the European colonial powers.

46. See Majid Fakhry, *An Interpretation of the Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings, A Bilingual Edition* (New York: New York University Press, 2002). Hereafter cited as Fakhry. The quoted verse is from the Surah *Tawbah*: 5.

47. See [chapter 4](#).

48. See Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34. Scheuer argues that Bin Laden was not an admirer of Sayyid Qutb and never cited him; however, other al-Qaeda writers often cite Qutb. In fact, it might be argued that Qutb's thinking soaked into jihadist Salafist thought and influenced it whether it is recognized or not. As we

shall see (chapter 5), Abu Mus'ab al-Suri cites Sayyid Qutb as "Sayyid" with the confidence that his readers will immediately know whom he means.

49. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14–22.

50. Thomas Hegghammer has demonstrated that while Saudi Arabian citizens over the last several decades have supported jihad, they by and large did not support al-Qaeda's ideology, and the vast majority would not support violence against their own government or the United States.

51. An example of this phenomenon is the website Minbar al-Tawhid wa'l-Jihad (The pulpit of tawhid and jihad), perhaps the most extensive jihadist library on the web. Many of the entries are Salafist commentaries on different aspects of the religion of Islam, many are articles and books of historical significance, and some are straight from the mouths of the current and former al-Qaeda leadership, its lieutenants, and supporters.

52. Many Awlaki videos have appeared on the Internet. The interview cited above was in Arabic and first appeared in May 2010. I viewed it a second time, this time with English subtitles, on September 4, 2011, at the website www.islamictube.com. Awlaki was killed in an American airstrike on September 30, 2011.

2. The Leadership Inspires a New Strategy

1. The pullout was completed on February 15, 1989; Camille Tawil suggests that Bin Laden may not have been al-Qaeda's first commander and may have been merely one of the founders. See Camille Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, trans. Robin Bray (London: Saqi, 2010), 24–29; regardless of various accounts, however, the preponderance of evidence shows Bin Laden as the motive force in the foundation, although he was not alone.

2. See Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 153, for al-Qaeda membership as of September 20, 1988. The number 6,000 (p. 157) is based on Pakistani records and represents the presence between 1987–1993.

3. Hamas in Arabic is an acronym for "The Islamic Resistance Movement."

4. For Bin Laden's 1996 declaration, see Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth (London: Verso, 2005), 23–30.

5. See Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Scheuer's portrait of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's relationship contradicts much of the conventional wisdom about Bin Laden being a simple man manipulated by the wily al-Zawahiri. Scheuer's argument is backed up by an impressive amount of research and pays careful attention to what Bin Laden actually wrote and said.

6. Al-Zawahiri denies that he was ever a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, although this is widely reported. See Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner (Fursan Tahta Rayah al-Nabi)*, 2nd ed. (As Sahab Publishers), 2 n. 2. <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo>. The second edition (502 pages) contains much new material but shows no significant variance from the strategic points made in the first edition. The

first and second editions of this book will hereafter be referred to in the body of the text as *Knights1* and *Knights2*, respectively.

7. Lawrence Wright, "The Man Behind Bin Laden," *New Yorker* (September 16, 2006).

8. Central Asia is a recurring theme as a likely place for a new emirate, which could become a caliphate. The Syrian jihadist and strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri devoted a book to Central Asia: *The Muslims in Central Asia and the Coming Battle of Islam* (Kabul: The al-Ghuraba Center for Islamic Studies, November 5, 1999), <http://www.archive.org/details/MuslimsInCentralAsiaAndTheComingBattleOfIslam>.

9. For a full translation of this declaration, see Jim Lacey, ed., *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008), [chap. 1](#). Signatories included Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha (Egyptian Islamic Group), Mir Hamzah (Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan), and Fazlur Rahman (Jihad Movement in Bangladesh).

10. "Fanaticism" refers to the susceptibility of some young men to a generalized call to jihad against the perceived enemies of Islam and the tendency to develop fierce loyalty to a charismatic leader. These qualities are not unique to the Arabian Peninsula, but Bin Laden looked here first as his ancestral homeland. Although Egyptian nationalism may be a factor in the internal al-Qaeda disputes, the intention of the phrase "Egyptian radicalism" means those jihadists that were formed intellectually from the radical thinking of Egyptian Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb and Abd al-Salam Faraj. Arguably, the Syrian strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, who broke from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, belongs in this category, although the original thought that he developed over a lifetime of jihad goes well beyond the Egyptian framework. Al-Suri's early mentors were Egyptian or had studied in Egypt, as did al-Suri briefly.

11. See [chapter 1](#). For an exposition of Salafism in its various forms, see Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). See also Mark E. Stout, Jessica M. Huckabey, and John R. Schindler, *The Terrorist Perspectives Project* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

12. See Steve Coll, *The Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 186, for an example of how Taliban officials in 1998 were "puzzled" that Bill Richardson was concerned about Bin Laden's decree that it was a religious duty for Muslims to attack Americans because "Bin Laden was not a qualified Islamic scholar."

13. Michael Scheuer has given ample evidence that Bin Laden's basic concepts were formed before he met al-Zawahiri; see Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden*, 8–15.

14. Stephane LaCroix recounts that the relationship between Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri became cemented by 1996 based in part on the Egyptian's need for Bin Laden's support in the light of the failure of his Egyptian Islamic Jihad as an organization; see also Stephane Lacroix, "Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Veteran of Jihad," in *Al-Qaeda in Its Own Words*, ed. Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, trans. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 147–170.

15. *Knights2/Arabic*, 60.

16. *Knights2/Arabic*, 323.

17. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula confirmed this view in 2010. See Michael W. S. Ryan, "After Bin Laden: Al-Qaeda Strategy in Yemen," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 20, (May 20, 2011), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37949. Abu Bakr Naji was close to al-Qaeda's leadership. We do not know his identity beyond his works.

18. *Knights1/Arabic*, 3. There are two authorized editions of this book on the Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad website. Both editions on the Minbar site are the only officially approved versions. The first approved edition was published eight years after it first surfaced in English translation. Pagination of the first edition's text may vary. All page references are to the version accessed by the author on April 30, 2012, from the Minbar website cited above. The date on the Arabic text is July 2, 2001, but this is not the date of publication but purports to be the date when al-Zawahiri completed it. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

19. Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 16.

20. *Knights1/Arabic*, 3.

21. Michael W. S. Ryan, "Al-Qaeda on Pakistan: Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri's Morning and the Lamp," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 11 (March 19, 2010), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36176.

22. *Knights1/Arabic*, 2.

23. Al-Zawahiri does not refer to Laura Mansfield's published translation, with which he may not have been familiar. See Laura Mansfield, *His Own Words: A Translation of the Writings of Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri* (Lexington, Ky.: TLG, 2006).

24. We do not know how al-Zawahiri was sure that he had a copy of the original. Perhaps he had saved it on external media, which would be easier to carry on the run, or perhaps he had given copies to trusted colleagues.

25. Harmony Document AFGP-2002-601693, July 26, 2002 (English translation), Combating Terrorism Center at West Point website, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/?s=AFGP-2002-601693&type=all&program=all&order=desc>.

26. Peter Bergen has put together available evidence to describe the circumstances leading to Bin Laden's and al-Zawahiri's escapes from Tora Bora. See Peter Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and al-Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 68–85.

27. *Knights2/Arabic*, 1.

28. Adam Gadahn, also known as Azzam al-Amriki, is an American convert to Islam known for his contributions to videos and statements by al-Qaeda's leadership. He is likely responsible for the very American flavor to the graphics and criticism of the United States in al-Zawahiri's *Knights2*.

29. *Knights2/Arabic*, 2 n. 2.

30. *Knights1/Arabic*, 208.

31. See Evgenii Novikov, "A Russian Agent at the Right Hand of Bin Laden?" *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 2, no. 1, (January 15, 2004).

http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=427&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=179&no_cache=1. In a conversation with the author in December 2010, Novikov, a former Soviet Politburo officer who had spoken to a number of "contacts in Bishkek" about the issue, expressed incredulity that al-Zawahiri would have been able to maintain his disguise in Russian captivity at a time when the Russians would have been extremely sensitive to Muslim Arabs fishing in the troubled waters of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Novikov also thought the release of a stateless person of al-Zawahiri's description strains credulity. Glen Howard, president of the Jamestown Foundation, in a conversation in October 2011 provided support for the view that the Russians interrogated and possibly trained al-Zawahiri. Howard received details about the Russian handling of al-Zawahiri during a deathbed interview with the Soviet KGB defector Alexander Litvinenko, in 2006. Of course, individuals can fall through security nets, but the point is that what others can believe, jihadists could question as well. Stephane LaCroix suggests mere Russian incompetence in Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al-Qaeda in Its Own Words*, 158.

32. *Knights1/Arabic*, 209.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. For the long and varied history and thought of al-Suri, see [chapter 5](#). Al-Suri respected Bin Laden, but their relationship was rocked by disagreements mainly about policy toward the Taliban. Al-Suri's respect for and friendship with al-Zawahiri endured.

36. See [chapter 1](#) for an examination of Faraj's thought. Faraj did not advocate attacking Israel before revolutionary jihad in Muslim states, starting with Egypt, was complete.

37. See *Knights1/Arabic*, 127ff. for al-Zawahiri's criticism of the treaty's conditions regarding Sinai.

38. The Gama'ah Islamiyya was responsible for the first bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Its spiritual leader, Omar Abdel Rahman, is serving a life sentence in the United States. See Joseph P. Fried, "Sheik Sentenced to Life in Prison in Bombing Plot," *New York Times* (January 18, 1996), <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/01/18/nyregion/sheik-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-in-bombing-plot.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

39. The Arabic word I have translated as "establishing an Islamic emirate" is *tam-kin*. This may also be translated as "empowerment," but the usage by jihadists generally means that stage in jihadist guerrilla warfare in which the areas under jihadist control are consolidated to form a jihadist emirate, which is in keeping with al-Zawahiri's call for establishing an area under jihadist control in the center of Muslim lands. See Naji's use of this term in *The Administration of Savagery (Admin/Arabic)*, 15, where Naji provides the phrase "establishing the state" to explain *tamkin*. This is the third stage of Naji's three-stage guerrilla program. See [note 3](#) in chapter 4 for bibliographic details of Naji's text.

40. The two slogans are fundamental to al-Qaeda. *Hakimiyyah* is a key concept borrowed from Sayyid Qutb to describe the basis of all governance

belonging to Allah. *Wala' wa al-bara'* is a Wahhabi phrase often used by al-Qaeda members and sympathizers and is the name of one of al-Zawahiri's books. It refers to the need for jihadists to cling to Muslim or in this case Salafist jihadist doctrine and adherents and reject the Shi'ah and non-Muslims.

41. This excerpt is drawn from *Knights1/Arabic*, 210–214. Although al-Zawahiri was opposed to attempting guerilla warfare in Egypt, he strongly supported terrorist attacks against American interests there and against the previous Mubarak government.

42. See, *Knights2/Arabic*, 323. Al-Zawahiri refers to the 9/11 Commission's Report (*National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/index.htm>) and William McCants, ed., *Militant Ideology Atlas Research Compendium*, West Point Combating Terrorism Center (2006), <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/militant-ideology-atlas>.

43. For instance, al-Zawahiri adopted the concept of “striking behind enemy lines” before al-Suri began his magnum opus (*The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*) and before Naji wrote about independent actors making the “enemy” pay the price for military operations against al-Qaeda and before Naji writing about small-group and individual resistance in second-tier-priority targets like Egypt. This concept was no doubt discussed internally before al-Zawahiri publicly endorsed it.

44. For a discussion of the timing of the decision to launch jihad in Saudi Arabia in 2002–2003 and al-Zawahiri's part in the decision, see Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 182–184; Hegghammer reports that many of the operatives tasked with leading the terrorist campaign inside Saudi Arabia did not want to rush the launch of the insurgency while al-Zawahiri argued for pressing ahead. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri agreed, and the decision against delay was sealed.

45. The dissidents primarily belonged to the Shu'aybi school; see *ibid.*, 83–98.

46. *Knights1/Arabic*, 215.

47. *Ibid.*, 215–216.

48. Bergen, *The Longest War*, 7–8.

49. The first Egyptian caliphate belonged to the Fatimid dynasty (969–1169), a Shi'ah regime that was overthrown along with the Fatimid caliphate by Saladin (and his uncle Shirkuh). Saladin is one of al-Zawahiri's and other al-Qaeda writers' favorite historical heroes.

50. Stephane LaCroix traces the intellectual journey of al-Zawahiri from a focus on fighting the near enemy first (Egypt) to fighting the far enemy (the West, especially the United States): “Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Veteran of Jihad,” in Kepel and Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*; see 151 for al-Zawahiri's youthful views on a jihadist military coup.

51. Bergen, *The Longest War*, 75.

52. *Knights1/Arabic*, 216–217.

53. Al-Zawahiri includes quotes from the Qur'an, Al Imran: 146. The published English translations (e.g., Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 218) do not

include the reference to Egypt.

54. Al-Zawahiri includes quotes from the Qur'an, al-Nisa': 104.

55. This excerpt is drawn from *Knights1/Arabic*, 218. Al-Zawahiri finishes this paragraph with an example of how a jihadist leader, Shaykh Shamil, after defeat by the Russians in the Caucasus, became an inspiration and role model for jihad for later generations.

56. The Arabic text of the authorized first edition refers to the "masters in Washington," as in my translation above. The original English translation of this text is widely available on the Internet in PDF and Web Archive formats. Texts in both formats contain "masters in Washington and Tel Aviv" in the passage translated above. See also Mansfield, *His Own Words*, 219. Mansfield states that she translated the book that appeared in 2001, and her translation also cites "masters in Washington and Tel Aviv." We must assume that al-Zawahiri edited "Tel Aviv" out of the book that he finally published more than eight years later on the Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad website, for reasons he does not reveal. It is clear, however, that al-Qaeda's rhetoric against Israel outstripped its actions in the intervening years.

57. *Knights1/Arabic*, 218–219.

58. *Tala'i' al-Khurasan* (The vanguards of Khorasan) 14 (June 2009); downloaded from the Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad website: <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=369>.

59. *Knights1/Arabic*, 219.

60. Ibid., 220. Al-Zawahiri uses the Arabic term *nikayah*, which is the same term that Naji uses to characterize the first phase of classic insurgency he is describing in his *Administration of Savagery*; it is sometimes translated as "vexation" and refers to harassing terrorist attacks aimed at weakening an enemy; the word I translate as "attack" is not used as a jihadist term of art and means a blow, hitting or striking a target.

61. Ibid. Al-Zawahiri uses the Arabic for "martyrdom operations" where I have used the more familiar term (in English) "suicide operations"; al-Qaeda authors do not use the term "suicide operations" in Arabic because suicide would be considered a grave sin without the thin ideological justification that such attacks, especially on noncombatants, are actually a form of martyrdom.

3. Jihad as Revolution

1. By "representative" I mean that the authors have captured the essence of what was believed by many jihadists who associated with al-Qaeda. Being representative does not mean that these authors were the most famous, the most popular, or the most influential, although they were all influential and all represent the thinking of al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden overall. Experts have argued concerning what author was the most influential at a given time; however, my purpose is to portray al-Qaeda's mainstream political-military strategy and the ideology on which it is based. I chose these authors as the best gateway to that purpose.

2. See William McCants, *Militant Ideology Atlas Research Compendium* (West Point Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), 292, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/militant-ideology-atlas>.

3. Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarah al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (The administration of savagery: the most dangerous phase through which the ummah will pass) (N.p.: Markaz al-Dirasat wa al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah, probably late 2004), 30. Hereafter cited as *Admin/Arabic*. <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr>.

4. Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac, 2002).

5. Abu Ubayd Al-Qurashi, "Al-Hurub al-Thawriyyah" ("Revolutionary wars"), 1. <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=kfjxiygb>. Hereafter cited as *RevWars/Arabic*.

6. Al-Qurashi did not fully develop the context of fourth-generation warfare as envisaged by the American theorists he copied. For example, he did not champion high-tech weapons as force multipliers; rather he emphasizes the traditional guerrilla truism that insurgent armies without territories to defend have certain real advantages over conventional armies with responsibility to defend fixed plots of land and their inhabitants. As do all other al-Qaeda strategists, he argues that the global Muslim community, if united in a common purpose, could not be defeated. Al-Zawahiri's book cited here is: Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner (Fursan Tahta Rayah al-Nabi)*, 1st ed. (N.p.: Al-Sahab, n.d.), 3, <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=3i806qpo>. The first and second editions of this book will hereafter be referred to as *Knights1* and *Knights2*, respectively.

7. The author cites an Arabic-language version of the selected writings of Mao Tsetung published by the "Foreign Language Press" (Beijing, 1963). His references to English-language sources cite the text in English, suggesting that the author probably read English proficiently.

8. *RevWars/Arabic*, 3.

9. *Ibid.*, 3.

10. Regis Debray was associated with Che Guevara in Bolivia. See "Revolution in the Revolution," *Wired* 3, no. 1 (January 1995). <http://wired.com/wired/archive/3.01/debray.html?pg=2&topic=>.

11. *RevWars/Arabic*, 3.

12. *Ibid.*, 4.

13. See Peter Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy, from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

14. *RevWars/Arabic*, 4 n. 3.

15. Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (St. Petersburg, Fla.: Red and Black, 2008). Marighella (1911–1969) was a Brazilian communist.

16. *RevWars/Arabic*, 6.

17. *Ibid.*, 7.

18. The "climate of collapse" that al-Qurashi attributes to Marighella is similar to a concept of the climate of revolution that is common among Marxist strategists. Al-Qaeda strategists have referred to this as "the climate of jihad."

19. *RevWars/Arabic*, 8.

20. See Regis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution?* (New York: Grove, 1969).

21. *Fawda* (chaos) is used as a synonym for *tawahhush* (savagery) by Abu Bakr Naji in *Admin/Arabic*, 11.

22. *RevWars/Arabic*, 9.

23. Al-Qurashi mistakenly cited the Brighton bombing as occurring in 1985; the attack did kill several ministers but failed to kill Margaret Thatcher, whose popularity soared after a speech she made the next day—not the results the IRA wanted.

24. The date of publication of “Al-Hurub al-Thawriyyah” (“Revolutionary wars”) is not evident in the online copy, but in his conclusion the author refers to examples of “wars in this century,” all of which are twentieth-century wars; in addition, he makes no reference to any twenty-first-century events, something he does constantly in his post9/11 writings for the magazine *Al-Ansar*.

25. Universal laws are the rational laws that govern the universe but are not mentioned in the Qur’an because they are discoverable by human observation. The example usually given is the appearance that the sun rises in east every day, but universal laws also govern human events like the laws of war and politics.

26. Abu Ubayd Al-Qurashi, “Al-Qaeda and the Art of War,” *Majallah Al-Ansar* 1 (January 15, 2002): 10–15, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=324>. *Al-Ansar* was termed an “electronic magazine.” Like other al-Qaeda journalistic productions, it was well designed and well written and covered a variety of topics from al-Qaeda’s point of view.

27. *Ibid.*, 10.

28. For two compelling accounts of how the United States was actually successful in overthrowing the Taliban and dispersing al-Qaeda, see Gary Schroen, *First In: An Insider’s Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Presidio, 2007); and Gary Bernstein and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda: A Personal Account by the CIA’s Key Field Commander* (New York: Crown, 2005).

29. Peter L. Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and al-Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 80–84. This section also describes a video of Bin Laden after Tora Bora in which he seemed fatigued and perhaps wounded. Al-Qurashi would have his readers believe this was merely disinformation by Bin Laden, something to which no Western analyst gives much credence.

30. Presumably Wei Liaozi.

31. Abu Ubayd Al-Qurashi, “Hurub al-Jil al-Rabi” (“Fourth-generation wars”), *Majallah Al-Ansar* 2 (January 28, 2002): 15–21; hereafter cited as 4GW/Arabic. <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=325>.

32. William S. Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette* (October 1989): 22–27. Published simultaneously in the *Military Review* (October 1989): 3–11. <http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/singleitem/collection/p124201coll1/id/506/rec/2>.

33. Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis, Minn.: MBI, 2006).

34. Ibid., 2.

35. Ibid., 204; Hammes also briefly cites Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi (203).

36. William S. Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation Warfare," *ANTIWAR.com* (January 15, 2004), <http://antiwar.com/lind/index.php?articleid=1702>.

37. Andrew Black, "Al-Suri's Adaptation of Fourth Generation Warfare Doctrine," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 8 (September 26, 2006).

38. 4GW/Arabic.

39. There were two Intifadas: 1987–1993 and 2000–2005 (approximate).

40. For an alternate view of 4GW, see Antulio J. Echevarria, "Fourth-Generation War and Other Myths," Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army, November 2005, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=632>.

In the American system, debates about strategy and potential threats are passionately argued and have real consequences on the allocation of budgets. The debates about 4GW are sophisticated with detailed public arguments on both sides.

41. Abu Ubayd Al-Qurashi, "Uyun Amrika" ("The eyes of America"), *Majallah al-Ansar* 12 (June 26, 2002): 10–14, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=325>.

42. Third-generation warfare is the warfare of firepower and maneuver that characterized World War II.

43. Abu Ubayd Al-Qurashi, "Kawabis Amrika" ("America's nightmares"), *Majallah al-Ansar* 3 (February 13, 2002): 15–21, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=325>.

44. Ibid., 16.

45. Peter Bergen has debunked most of the popular concepts about al-Qaeda's obtaining a nuclear device (see *The Longest War*, 214–230); obtaining some sort of nuclear device no doubt remains high on al-Qaeda's priority list and raises disturbing questions concerning its continuing involvement in non-Arab, nuclear-armed Pakistan.

46. Abu Ubayd Al-Qurashi, "Min Miyunikh ila Niyu Yurk" ("From Munich to New York"), *Majallah Al-Ansar* 4 (February 27, 2002): 9–14, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=325>.

47. Ibid., 11–12.

48. According to Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August 2011, Israel maintained bilateral diplomatic relations with 157 countries; according to Nabil Shaath, a senior member of the Palestinian National Authority, in September 2011, 125 countries recognized Palestine, although it did not enjoy the status of a state at the time.

49. Al-Qurashi, "From Munich to New York," 13.

50. "Infinite Justice" was the name used for the military response to 9/11, which was later changed to "Enduring Freedom"; President Bush used the

term “crusade” regarding the U.S. war on terror in remarks to reporters on the South Lawn of the White House on September 16, 2001.

51. Al-Qurashi, “From Munich to New York,” 13–14.

52. The word for oppressed in Arabic, *mustad’afina*, appears five times in the Qur’an, for example, in Surat al-Anfal: 26: “Remember when you were few and were deemed weak in the land.” The word for “deemed weak” may also be translated as “oppressed.” It easily carries both meanings. It does not mean the “weak ones,” only those deemed to be weak and are therefore oppressed. Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea* was translated into Arabic as *The War of the Oppressed (Harb al-Mustad’afina)* and was a basic sourcebook on guerrilla warfare for al-Qaeda and other jihadists.

53. All twenty-eight volumes are available at <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=325>. Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi wrote twenty-seven articles for the magazine from January 15, 2002, until his last article on April 3, 2003.

54. Jarret M. Brachman has given an interesting analysis of several of al-Qurashi’s *Al-Ansar* articles; see Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 83–89.

55. Naji (see [chapter 4](#)) appends “May Allah preserve him” after al-Qurashi’s name, which probably indicates that Naji thought he was alive in late 2004, at least.

56. Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi, “Amrika w’ al-Hamlah al-Salibiyyah: Ila Ayn? (“America and the Crusader campaign: where to?”), *Al-Ansar* 11 (June 6, 2002): 11–16, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=325>.

57. Al-Qurashi cites the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and specifically Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Lasting Challenge: A Strategy for Counter-Terrorism and Asymmetric Warfare,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, <http://csis.org/publication/lasting-challenge-strategy-counterterrorism-and-asymmetric-warfare>.

58. The attack was against the La Belle Discotheque in Berlin on April 5, 1986; for a British account of the American response, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/15/newsid_3975000/3975455.stm.

59. For a contemporary account of these bombings see http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/7/newsid_3131000/3131709.stm.

60. Al-Qurashi, “America and the Crusader Campaign,” 15.

61. Norman Cigar, *Al-Qa’ida’s Doctrine for Insurgency: ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz Al-Muqrin’s A Practical Course for Guerrilla War* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac, 2009), 13.

62. Yusuf al-Uyayri (also al-Ayyeri) was the original leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. He was a prolific writer and organizer of clandestine networks. He is considered the most talented and powerful figure in jihadist circles in Saudi Arabia before his death. He was a major influence on al-Muqrin. According to *Sawt al-Jihad* 1 (September 2003): 16, Saudi forces killed al-Uyayri on “3/30/1424 h.,” or May 31, 2003.

63. My account of the al-Qaeda jihad in Saudi Arabia benefitted greatly from Thomas Hegghammer’s *Jihad in Saudi Arabia* (2010). For the

relationship of events in Saudi Arabia (2003–2006) to al-Qaeda doctrine and strategy, I often referred to Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*.

64. Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 60 n. 10; also see an interview with al-Muqrin in the first two numbers of the biweekly journal of the jihad in Saudi Arabia: *Sawt al-Jihad* (September/October, 2003), 1:22–25, 2:22–26.

65. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *9/11 Commission Report*, 234, <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/index.htm>.

66. For L'Houssain Kherchtou's eyewitness account of the al-Farouq camp, see Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 101–103. Kherchtou describes his experiences in Pakistan with a young Saudi named Abd al-Aziz who could well have been al-Muqrin. For a detailed account of life in al-Qaeda's camps, see Omar Nasiri (pseudonym), *Inside the Jihad, My Life with Al Qaeda* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2006). *The 9/11 Commission Report* (232) states that of the recruits in Afghan training camps, 70 percent were Saudi, 20 percent were Yemeni, and 10 percent were from elsewhere, according to one senior al-Qaeda leader.

67. *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 102. This specialized training occurred inside Pakistan at a facility set up by Bin Laden; if al-Muqrin had followed the route of Kherchtou, he would have pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and al-Qaeda before he received the enhanced operational training.

68. Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 6–7. Cigar provides a synthesis of sources for al-Muqrin's biography. Although many of the details of al-Muqrin's life are sketchy, we know more about him than many of the other strategists and ideologues precisely because he devoted so much of his life to operations. His interview published in *Sawt al-Jihad* in 2003 (cited above) also gives some details; see also Nasiri, *Inside the Jihad*, 62–80, for a description of one smuggling operation.

69. See Evan F. Kohlmann, "Shabaab al-Mujahideen: Migration and Jihad in the Horn of Africa," NEFA Foundation (May 2009), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/index.cfm?pageID=24>; for al-Uyayri's biography see also *Sawt al-Jihad* 1 (September/October 2003): 16–19, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=339>. Ogaden is an ethnic Somali district under the control of Ethiopia.

70. *Sawt al-Jihad* 2 (October 2003): 23. <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=339>.

71. Ibid.

72. George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 248; Tenet presents the timing of the decision as part of talking points he delivered to then Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in the spring of 2003.

73. Norman Cigar cites this fact of decision making in his *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 37, in the context of the debate surrounding the timing of the Saudi jihad.

74. Ibid., 70 n. 140.

75. See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 111, for an example of the quality over quantity principle.

76. Ibid., 113–114, 118–119.

77. For a brief analysis and translation of this declaration, see Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth (London: Verso, 2005), 23–30; for the relationship of this declaration to Bin Laden's declaration of war, see Thomas Hegghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (February 25, 2010), 7, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-failure-of-jihad-in-saudi-arabia>.

78. I have cited Hegghammer's identification of the three phases of the development of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia to highlight one of the major weaknesses in al-Qaeda's doctrine and strategy of global jihad: its divergence from traditional Muslim views of the meaning of jihad. Global jihad is a revolution following revolutionary doctrine and strategy and is not primarily a defense of Muslim lands. In fact, global jihad invites attacks on Muslim lands to create the revolutionary tide al-Qaeda hopes to ride for its own political objectives. I do not mean to imply that Hegghammer's conclusions agree with mine.

79. The term "pan-Islamism" when applied to Saudi Arabia generally refers to Sunni Islam and does not extend to Shi'ah groups.

80. Although the usual term for Saudi Salafism is "Wahhabism," the negative connotations of the term both in Saudi Arabia and the West invite stereotyping, whether an author intends it or not. For an explanation of his tripartite characterization of Salafism, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (April–May 2006): 207–239.

81. Stephane Lacroix, "Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and His Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 58–80.

82. See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 83–97; see also Murad Batal al-Shishani, "Saudi Arabia's Jihadi Jailbird: A Portrait of al-Shu'aybi Ideologue Nasir al-Fahd," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor Foundation* 1, no. 12 (December 22, 2010), http://dev.jamestown.org/124/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37304

83. Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 47.

84. Hegghammer, "The Failure of Jihad in Saudi Arabia," 18.

85. Paul Johnson was a civilian who worked on Saudi Arabian helicopter maintenance. A cell led by al-Muqrin kidnapped him on June 12, 2004, killed him on June 18, and posted a video of his beheading on the Internet.

86. Abu Hajir Abd al-Aziz Al-Muqrin, *Dawrah al-Tanfidh Wa Harb al-'Asabat* (A practical course for guerrilla war) (N.p.: al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, September 2004), http://www.e-prism.org/images/battarbook_tanfeedh.pdf. Hereafter cited as *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic.

87. For a discussion on the use of small training camps intended to be used for as little as one week, see Stephen Ulph, "Secret Camps Offer Operational Courses in Jihad Tactics," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 12 (March 28, 2006), <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/>

[tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=718&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=239&no_cache=1](#).

88. Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 45. Cigar points out that al-Uyayri made the case for urban warfare in a recorded lecture on guerrilla war.

89. *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic, 2. See also Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 88.

90. Mao Tse-tung, *The Art of War*, special ed., trans. Foreign Language Press, Peking (El Paso, Tex.: El Paso Norte, 2006).

91. For an examination of tribal mores and conflict, see Philip Carl Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Humanity, 2008).

92. *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic 11; see also Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 92

93. Taber, *War of the Flea*, 58.

94. Norman Cigar translates this phrase as a "to create a successful resistance." *Sumud* means "staying power," especially in the face of an opponent; *najih* means "successful."

95. See *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic, 12. See also Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 93; I use "semiconventional army" to translate *al-jaysh al-askari*, where *jaysh* is the ordinary word for army and *askari* can mean military but implies a constabulary; "semiconventional" was the term used by Michael Scheuer to describe al-Muqrin's call for units that were more like a regular army than guerrilla bands.

96. See Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 177 n. 7; Cigar identifies Khattab as a Saudi by the name of Samir bin Salih Al-Suwaylim, who was a jihadist leader in Afghanistan and Tajikistan before fighting in Chechnya in 1995. His biography was included in *Mu'askar al-Battar* 14 (June–July 2004).

97. Michael Scheuer, "Al-Qaeda Doctrine: The Eventual Need for Semi-Conventional Forces," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus* 3, no. 20 (October 21, 2006), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=781&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=239&no_cache=1.

98. *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic, 12; see also Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 94.

99. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War People's Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 29.

100. Al-Muqrin refers to al-Qaeda's terrorists in Saudi Arabia as mujahedeen, the religiously correct way to refer to soldiers engaged in classic defensive jihad. This use is a fiction as the only fighters at that time were members of al-Qaeda and American forces had not attacked Saudi Arabia. I have referred to these fighters or terrorists as al-Qaeda or jihadists.

101. See Cigar, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency*, 177 n. 9.

102. The Arabic term I have translated as "high-value operations" in Arabic is *amaliyyat naw'iyyah*, which may be translated literally as "quality

operations” or Norman Cigar’s rendering as “spectacular operations.”

103. See Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 204–205.

104. The battle of Badr (624 c.e.) was the first major military victory of the Prophet Muhammad over his pagan enemies and is widely celebrated in Muslim history and lore.

105. For example, al-Qaeda, in the magazine *Sawt al-Jihad* 4 (November–December 2003): 5–7, in an article entitled “The Muhayya Compound Explosion,” attempted to debunk the Saudi press announcements that most of those killed in Muhayya had been Arabs and Muslims, including women and children. The general population believed the official account and saw the attack as an outrage.

106. *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic, 76; see also Cigar, *Al-Qa’ida’s Doctrine for Insurgency*, 171.

107. See Michael W. S. Ryan, “After Bin Laden: Al-Qaeda Strategy in Yemen,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 20 (May 20, 2011), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37949.

108. *Dawrah al-Tanfidh*/Arabic, 23; see also Cigar, *Al-Qa’ida’s Doctrine for Insurgency*, 109.

4. An Action Plan for Savagery

1. Stephen Ulph has written a précis of *Idarah al-Tawahhush*, “New Online Book Lays out al-Qaeda’s New Military Strategy,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus* 2, no. 6 (May 5, 2005), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=182&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=238&no_cache=1. See also Jim Lacey, ed., *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists’ Strategy for Defeating America* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 48–87.

2. See William McCants, “Managing Savagery in Saudi Arabia,” *Jihadica* (June 26, 2008), <http://www.jihadica.com/managing-savagery-in-saudi-arabia/>. The jihadist who reported Naji’s death was Husayn b. Mahmud. Naji’s last article in the magazine *Sawt al-Jihad* (August/September 2004) indicated that he was still alive.

3. Ibid. The John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University funded McCants translation of Naji’s *Idarah al-Tawahhush* into English. See <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/olin/images/Management%20of%20Savagery%20-%202005-23-2006.pdf>. My translations are from the Arabic version: Abu Bakr Naji, *Idarah al-Tawahhush: Akhtar Marhalah Satamurru biha al-Ummah* (N.p.: Markaz al-Dirasat wa al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah, probably late 2004). Available at the Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad web-site: <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=chr3ofzr>. I have consulted McCants’s excellent translation, but all the translations included in the present book are my own. I am responsible for any mistakes in translation or interpretation. All citations are to the Arabic PDF version, hereafter cited as *Admin*/Arabic.

4. See Michael W. S. Ryan, “After Bin Laden: Al-Qaeda Strategy in Yemen,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 20 (May 20, 2011), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37949. Naji cites other al-Qaeda

ideologues and strategists. His thinking is a development of lessons learned in Afghanistan and includes the training received there.

5. The book endorsed by al-Qaeda that asserts that AQAP is following Naji's strategy is Muhammad Amir Al-Awlaki, *Limadha Ikhtartu al-Qaeda?* (Why did I choose al-Qaeda?) (N.p.: Malahim Media, 2010), <http://www.archive.org/details/WhyIChooseALQaeda>. Al-Qaeda's Malahim Media also produced promotional videos both for the author and his book; see, for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNXFXWVcVrw>, which contains footage of the author purportedly one day before his death. AQAP's English-language magazine *Inspire* in its 2011 winter and spring issues published selected translations of *Why Did I Choose Al-Qaeda?* The author's name given as Shaykh Abu Mus'ab al-Awlaqi.

6. For the role of Yemen in al-Qaeda's strategy, see Michael Scheuer, "Yemen's Role in al-Qaeda's Strategy," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Focus* 5, no. 5 (February 7, 2008), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4708&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=246&no_cache=1; Chris Zambelis, "Attacks in Yemen Reflect al-Qaeda's Global Oil Strategy," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 6, no. 17 (September 4, 2008), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=5137&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=167&no_cache=1; Michael W. S. Ryan, "Al-Qaeda's Purpose in Yemen Described in Works of Jihad Strategists," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 4 (January 28, 2010), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35964; and Murad Batal al-Shishani, "An Assessment of the Anatomy of al-Qaeda in Yemen: Ideological and Social Factors," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 9 (March 4, 2010), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36111&cHash=cda33f4c3c. To read Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's account of Yemen and al-Qaeda in English, see Jim Lacey, ed., *A Terrorist's Call to Global Jihad* (Annapolis, Md. Naval Institute Press, 2008), 145–155.

7. Both *Mu'askar al-Battar* and *Sawt al-Jihad* and a number of other jihadist magazines are available in Arabic online at the jihadist website Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad: <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=324>. *Al-Battar* (the Saber) was also the nom du guerre of Yusuf al-Uyayri. For a description of *Sawt al-Jihad*, see <http://homelandsecurityus.com/archives/1528>.

8. *Admin/Arabic*, 15.

9. Al-Qaeda's leaders use the *bay'ah* to produce a religiously binding oath of loyalty from jihadist groups that request affiliation with al-Qaeda.

10. See <http://www.ahlalheeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=18804> for the example of *sunan kawniyyah* cited above used in a Salafist explanation. Some jihadists stretch the term in website discussions to demonstrate divine intervention in the affairs of men; e.g., <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=421764>.

11. For the complete text of this article, see *Admin/Arabic*, 95–100.

12. *Ibid.*, 100.

13. A full analysis of *sunan kawniyyah* is beyond the scope of this book.

14. Some of his articles for *Sawt al-Jihad* have a more polemical character. See "Manhajuna Rahmah li al-Alamin" ("Our program is a mercy

to the worlds”), *Admin/Arabic*, 101–105. In his article, Naji makes a defense of jihad (which is the “our program” of his title) that is reminiscent of the work of the Egyptian Abdul Salam Faraj (see [chapter 1](#)). Like Faraj, Naji rejects those Muslims who claim Islam is a religion of peace and that therefore jihad should be purely defensive.

15. *Admin/Arabic*, 4.

16. For a brief analysis of this work, see Michael W. S. Ryan, “Al-Qaeda on Pakistan: Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri’s *Morning and the Lamp*,” *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 11 (March 19, 2010), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36176.

17. For those who would like to take the consideration of writing style further, see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). Strauss’s small work is the classic study of deliberately fugitive writing styles by individuals who have reason to believe that the words they write could subject them to scrutiny by powerful political forces. In the case of al-Qaeda, the word “persecution” is not appropriate; prosecution is closer to the mark. Almost all al-Qaeda writers mask some aspect of their writings, if only to protect terrorist operations or the personal identity of their clandestine members.

18. See John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 258.

19. For a description of the relationship between Bin Laden and Hasan al-Turabi, see Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 186–187. Turabi held “progressive ideas” with which the al-Qaeda leader profoundly disagreed.

20. See Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), for a well-documented account of the activities of al-Awdah and al-Hawali. See also [chapter 3](#).

21. *Admin/Arabic*, 4.

22. For a description of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, see “The Sykes-Picot Agreement,” *BBC News* (November 29, 2001), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2001/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1681362.stm.

23. Ayman al-Zawahiri, “National Unity—A Worshipped Idol” (N.p.:As Sahab Media, n.d.), <http://www.tawhed.net/a.php?a=Zawahiri>; also available in Arabic: <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=16011026>.

24. *Admin/Arabic*, 5.

25. The phrase “paper tiger” was used by Mao Tse-tung to describe the United States; Bin Laden paraphrased this by saying that the “American soldier is a paper tiger,” in a 1998 interview with John Miller of ABC.

26. For the concept of “bleeding wars,” see Bruce Riedel, *The Search for Al Qaeda: Its Leadership, Ideology, and Future*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), 122–127.

27. My friend Lawrence J. Marczak suggested that victory could be seen as asymmetric in Naji’s context.

28. *Admin/Arabic*, 7. “Pure human reason” means thinking without reference to the shari’ah, which allows al-Qaeda’s strategists like Naji and al-Suri to thwart attacks based on their faulty religious interpretations.

29. *Admin/Arabic*, 7. Paul Kennedy is by birth a British historian who wrote *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Vintage, 1987).

30. *Admin/Arabic*, 7.

31. *Ibid.*, 8.

32. *Ibid.*, 9.

33. *Ibid.*

34. For the American context of the East African attacks, see George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 114–117. Naji refers to these attacks as “high-value operations” (*amaliyyat naw’iyyah*—lit.: “quality operations”), which is the same term he uses for the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

35. *Ulama’* (sing.: *alim*) are Islamic religious scholars that are generally recognized to have the religious authority to issue an opinion on points of Islamic law referred to as a fatwa. Neither Bin Laden nor al-Zawahiri is considered to have the authority to issue a fatwa by the vast majority of ulama. A translation of the 1998 declaration can be found at *PBS Newshour* (February 23, 1998), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/terrorism/international/fatwa_1998.html.

36. *Admin/Arabic*, 9–10.

37. The passage quoted originally appears on *Admin/Arabic*, 5. This topic begins on *Admin/Arabic*, 11.

38. The term *fawda* may be translated as chaos or anarchy. Both are applicable to the situation Naji is describing, but anarchy captures the sense of a lack of a formal government. As Naji will explain, the administration of savagery precedes the stage before a formal government is established.

39. *Admin/Arabic*, 11.

40. James Toth, “Islamism in Southern Egypt: A Case Study of a Radical Religious Movement,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (2003): 547–572.

41. *Admin/Arabic*, 11.

42. See Ja’far Sadiq and Shaykh Atiyyatullah, “Jihad Bila Qa’id, Talif: Mark Sayjman” (Leaderless Jihad by Mark Sageman), *Tala’i’ al-Khorasan* (The vanguards of Khorasan) 14 (June 2009): 29–37, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=369>. The magazine article presents a clear admission by al-Qaeda that young men with religious training rarely take part in jihad (as al-Qaeda describes it).

43. *Admin/Arabic*, 12.

44. *Ibid.*, 13.

45. *Ibid.*, 14.

46. This section begins on *ibid.*, 23.

47. The use of the term *ummah* plays at least two roles in al-Qaeda’s discourse. On the one hand, al-Qaeda uses the term to indicate the general

collective identity of Muslim communities around the world, which al-Qaeda hopes to unite in a war against the existing order. This is a slippery concept that can mean what the speaker wants it to mean. The second usage can refer to the transformed, unified coalition of Muslim communities. So when Naji refers to stages through which the ummah must pass, he is referring to the transformation of the collection of communities that have in common only that they are Muslim into a coalition of likeminded communities following a reformed Islam according to al-Qaeda's revolutionary concepts.

48. For the stages of first-tier priority states and second-tier priority states, see *Admin/Arabic*, 15.

49. The reference appears in a footnote in *ibid*.

50. Naji does not name specific studies. Al-Suri wrote about Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the Levant, Afghanistan, and the countries of Central Asia in the three-year period before 9/11. He had written earlier about Algeria and Syria. His 1,604 page *Call to Global Islamic Resistance* (2004) had a wider scope but was published when al-Suri thought of himself as independent. Naji by all indications did not have access to this latest work. Al-Suri was not the only one who performed assessments and country studies for Bin Laden.

51. *Admin/Arabic*, 16. See also [chapter 3](#) for al-Muqrin's description of the three stages of guerilla warfare.

52. For a translation of Zarqawi's pledge, see Jeffrey Poole, "Zarqawi's Pledge of Allegiance to Al-Qaeda: From *Mu'askar Al-Battar* 21," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 2, no. 24 (December 15, 2004), http://dev.jamestown.org/124/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=27305.

53. To my knowledge, Michael Scheuer was the first to characterize post-9/11 al-Qaeda Central as more inciter than operator.

54. *Admin/Arabic*, 16–17.

55. Despite this claim, al-Qaeda's capabilities have diminished over time because of the pressure from the United States and its international allies. With the failure of the jihad in Saudi Arabia, by 2005 al-Zawahiri was asking al-Zarqawi for funding. By this time al-Zarqawi's organization was receiving funding from sources in the Persian Gulf that al-Qaeda Central had hoped to tap. Al-Qaeda's international connections were still in existence, although under extreme and increasing pressure.

56. The high-value operations carried out by small groups can also be part of Naji's concept of making enemies pay the price for military operations like air attacks, against which al-Qaeda has no defense. Naji's concept is not as advanced as that of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.

57. *Admin/Arabic*, 18.

58. *Ibid*.

59. See Vahid Brown, "Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms in Al-Qa'ida, 1989–2006," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (January 7, 2007), 12–18, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/cracks-in-the-foundation-leadership-schisms-in-al-qaidafrom-1989-2006>. The analysis reveals the dysfunctional nature of the relationship among top al-Qaeda leadership, which sometimes disagreed about the relationship of al-Qaeda to the

Taliban, including the view of some that Afghans were not worthy of support.

60. *Admin/Arabic*, 19. In a related message, al-Qaeda's Arabic-language journal of Afghanistan's war against the United States, *Tala'i' al-Khorasan* (The vanguards of Khorasan) 14 (June 2009), on the Minbar al-Jihad wa al-Tawhid website, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=369>, was devoted to the proposition that the new Obama administration was confronted with a dilemma in Afghanistan: "Shameful Withdrawal or Ruinous Occupation." The article emphasized that the United States had changed the mission in Afghanistan from the search for Bin Laden and al-Qaeda to preventing the Taliban from returning to power in Afghanistan. The magazine emphasized that the U.S. mission in Afghanistan would be more difficult than Iraq.

61. The bulleted list is a condensation of material found on *Admin/Arabic*, 19.

62. As we shall see, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri develops the concept of independent individual and small-cell terrorism in great detail in his *Call to Global Islamic Jihad*.

63. Naji mentions Paul Kennedy on *Admin/Arabic*, 7.

64. *Ibid.*, 21.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Admin/Arabic*, 23.

67. Mufakkirat al-Islam: <http://www.islammemo.cc>. This Arabic-language site in its present form offers a wide variety of services with an Islamic focus on news and studies of various kinds.

68. Bruce Hoffman, "Rethinking Terrorism and Counterterrorism Since 9/11," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25, no. 5 (September 2002): 303–316.

69. Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz, *Al-Umdah fi I'dad Al-Iddah* (The pillar for the preparation of the many). The author is also known as Dr. Fadl. For the text of this book in Arabic, see <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=85ud42ss>.

70. *Admin/Arabic*, 26–27.

71. *Ibid.*, 27.

72. *Ibid.*, 28.

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*, 30. The concept that young jihadists should be exposed to modern military science is the flip side of al-Qurashi's complaints that the lack of military education and awareness was stunting Muslim ability to design creative plans for jihad.

75. *Ibid.*, 34.

76. In Arabic, *muwalah* can mean friendship but can also mean a contractual relationship with clients; the superior partner in this relationship does not govern the clients. Instead, the relationship is one that assumes mutual obligations, even though the superior partner is seen as the authority. The authority resembles friendship or a tribal-like code of honor, not to be confused with the authority of the tyrant.

77. See Philip Carl Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Humanity, 2008).

78. *Admin/Arabic*, 34.

79. *Ibid.*

80. For a compelling description of the reemergence of AQAP in Yemen and the U.S. response, see the afterword to Ambassador Edmund Hull's *High Value Target: Countering Al-Qaeda in Yemen* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac, 2011), 111–123.

81. For a discussion of the concept of balanced confrontation, see the introduction to Salzman, *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East*.

82. In a footnote (*Admin/Arabic*, 37), Naji reveals that in writing and editing this chapter, he relied on a notebook of “one of the researchers of one of the Islamic currents” that contained many mistakes. He claims that he used only the accurate portions in compiling this chapter. The footnote is attached to the long title of the chapter: “Understanding the Political Game of the Opponents and Their Allies and Undertaking to Oppose It or Cooperate with It in Accordance with Shari’ah Politics.”

83. *Admin/Arabic*, 38.

84. See note on *ibid.*, 48.

85. Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) was the great historian of North Africa who examined the relationship between settled and nomadic/tribal life in Arab societies. His focus was North Africa, but his presentation is universal. Salzman referred to Ibn Khaldun in his description of tribal solidarity. Tribal solidarity is based on kinship but is similar to *al-muwalah al-imaniyyah*, (faith-based bonds of solidarity), which Naji recommends as a potential source of power of the regions of the administration of savagery.

86. *Admin/Arabic*, 48 n. 12.

87. *Ibid.*, 72.

88. *Ibid.*, 77.

89. *Ibid.*, 80.

90. Thomas Hegghammer uses the term “global jihad” (see Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 10) in contrast to “classical jihad” as a way to distinguish al-Qaeda’s approach from that championed by Abdullah Azzam. Azzam’s approach, while violent and universally obligatory, does not target Muslim rulers or the United States without reference to specific local conditions. I have used classic jihad for defensive jihad acceptable to the majority of Islamists. Defensive jihad is generally associated with defending specific Muslim communities from invading forces. Jarret Brachman has laid out the contours of “Global jihadism” in his book of the same name: Jarret M. Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009). Global jihadism has become a term of art for al-Qaeda’s approach, although it is not restricted to al-Qaeda in the loosely construed jihadist movement.

5. The Jihadist Legacy of Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri

1. U.S. State Department information bulletin:
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/news/2004/11/sec-041118-usia01.htm>.

2. Al-Suri did not approve of the 9/11 attacks, but his reasons were not humanitarian; he thought the United States would respond by destroying much of what jihadists had built in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

3. Abu Mus'ab al Suri, *Da'wah al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah al-Alamiyyah* (The call to global Islamic resistance), parts 1–2 (N.p., December 2004), 1390. Hereafter cited as *Call*/Arabic. See <http://www.muslim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=328560/>. This document is also available in an MS Word version: <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hqkfgsb2>. See also Jim Lacey, ed., *A Terrorist's Call to Global Jihad* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008). Lacey's volume is a translation of selected passages of al-Suri's *Da'wah al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah al-Alamiyyah*. Translations of extracts from the *Call* may also be found in Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). I consulted the above translations, but all translations of the *Call* and al-Suri's other works in the present book are my own, and I am responsible for all errors in translation and interpretation.

4. *Call*/Arabic, 42.

5. Lia, *Architect*, 26.

6. Ibid., 27–28; Lia is quoting from Paul Cruickshank and Mohannad Hage Ali, "Abu Mus'ab al-Suri: Architect of the New Al-Qaeda," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 1 (January 2007): 9.

7. See *Call*/Arabic, 9.

8. See Lia, *Architect*, 30–34, for a discussion of his various aliases.

9. Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad website: <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hqkfgsb2/>. It is likely that he was born in October.

10. *Call*/Arabic, 42–43.

11. Al-Suri, *Al-Thawrah al-Islamiyyah al-Jihadiyyah fi Suriya* (The Islamic jihadist revolution in Syria), part 1 (N.p., 1991), 41–43. Al-Suri signed this book with the alias Umar Abd al-Hakim. Cited hereafter as *Thawrah*/Arabic. This document was formerly available on a commercial website, which has been seized by U.S. authorities for alleged federal crimes.

12. Lia, *Architect*, 37–40.

13. The diagram is in *Thawrah*/Arabic, part 2, 311.

14. Brynjar Lia points out that Suri's training in Egypt was cut short, possibly because of the escalating confrontation with radical Islamist elements in Egypt. See Lia, *Architect*, 43–45.

15. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, *Al-Hisad al-Murr: Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi Sitin Aman* (The bitter harvest: the Muslim Brothers across sixty years) (N.p.: al-Sumud, n.d.), <http://www.tawhed.ws/r?i=2gxseb4t>.

16. Al-Suri took this view even in his first book on the revolution in Syria: *Thawrah*/ Arabic, part 1, 39.

17. See *Mulahazat Hawla al-Tajribah al-Jihadiyyah Fi Suriya* (Observations on the jihadist experience in Syria) (N.p.: Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, 1991), <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hqkfgsb2>. When American troops searched al-Qaeda facilities and training camps in Afghanistan, they found this pamphlet, which had been used for training. The same text is available in a PDF version of Suri's longer work, *Thawrah*/ Arabic, 334–362.

18. For Naji's thought, see [chapter 4](#).
19. See Naji's reference to al-Suri: *Admin/Arabic*, 15 n. 1.
20. For the details of al-Suri's sojourn in Europe after leaving Jordan, see Lia, *Architect*, 51–68.
21. Murad Batal Shishani, "Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and the Third Generation of Salafi-Jihadists," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 3, no. 16 (August 15, 2005), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=547.
22. Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within: An Al Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism," *New Yorker* (June 2, 2008). Wright's article focuses on Dr. Fadl's rejection of violence from his Egyptian prison in 2007 and his relationship with al-Zawahiri. Dr. Fadl was also known as Abdul Qadir bin Abdul Aziz; an outline of his life in Arabic may be accessed at <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=85ud42ss/>. See also Lia, *Architect*, 88–101, for details of al-Suri's relations with the Egyptians during this period.
23. Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 164. See also Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 58–59. Scheuer's point that the influence al-Zawahiri had on Bin Laden is generally exaggerated is convincing. Scheuer also asserts, "Despite constant rumors, no evidence proves that bin Laden was in any way involved in the 1989 assassination of Azzam and his two sons." The same could be said for everyone who has been accused.
24. The account of the complex maneuvering among Afghan Arabs and Afghan warlords around the time of Azzam's assassination has been described in some detail in Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 189–204. For a detailed description of al-Zawahiri's relationship with Bin Laden and his rivalry with Azzam, see Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 148–164.
25. Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 220.
26. Al-Suri, Harmony Document AFGP-2002-601693 (translation) on the West Point Combating Terrorism Center website, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu>.
27. Translation quoted from Jim Lacey, ed., *The Canons of Jihad: Terrorists' Strategy for Defeating America* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 123.
28. Lia, *Architect*, 89.
29. *Call/Arabic*, 1352.
30. Lia, *Architect*, 91. Lia credits Thomas Hegghammer with the insight that Azzam ridiculed "revolutionary jihadis."
31. See *Call/Arabic*, 1130, 1424. Al-Suri refers to Azzam in terms of highest praise, with over fifty references to him in the text of *The Call to Global Islamic Jihad*.
32. Lia, *Architect*, 53.
33. *Ibid.*, 43; see also the Arabic-language biography at the Minbar al-Jihad wa al-Tawhid website: <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hqkfgsb2>.

34. Three lecture series ("Sitting with the Youth of Yemen," "Sitting with the Youth of the [Arabian] Peninsula," and "Jihad Is the Solution") are available at <http://www.tawhed.ws/a?a=hqkfgsb2/>.

35. *Call/Arabic*, 46.

36. Osama Bin Laden, quoted and translated in Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, trans. James Howarth (London: Verso, 2005), 187.

37. Lia, *Architect*, 102.

38. *Call/Arabic*, 49.

39. *Ibid.*, 49–50.

40. *Ibid.*, 53–55. I substituted bullet format instead of al-Suri's dense text.

41. See Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 143–144. As we shall see, Sageman's analysis and al-Suri's are similar, but al-Suri suggests a three-circle structure that Sageman does not recognize, just as Sageman does not recognize an overarching strategy except in a loose sense. Al-Suri contemplates coordination from the regional components of the structure (e.g., Pakistan and Yemen) and separation from the central structure, similar to what al-Zawahiri's suggests.

42. *Call/Arabic*, 54.

43. Ahmad Shakir (1892–1958) was an Egyptian legal scholar and judge noted for editing the collection of hadith attributed to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal; for an Arabic biography, see <http://www.eltwhed.com/vb/showthread.php?t=4565>.

44. *Call/Arabic*, 54.

45. Lia, *Architect*, 109.

46. *Ibid.*, 56.

47. For a copy of the Spanish Administration of Justice indictment for the March 11, 2004, bombings, see Administracion de Justicia, Juzgado Central de Instruccion no. 6, Audiencia Nacional, Madrid (July 19, 2004), <http://www.elmundo.es/documentos/2006/04/11/autohtml/indice.html>. The tally of the 191 dead appears on pages 6–11.

48. Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History of Al-Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 27–37.

49. *Ibid.*, 17.

50. Peter Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Touchstone Simon and Schuster, 2002), 5.

51. For an account of the trip to Bin Laden and the interview, see *ibid.*, 17–23.

52. For a brief, detailed account of jihad in Algeria, see Evan F. Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria: The GIA, the GSPC, and Al-Qaeda," NEFA Foundation (May 2007), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/index.cfm?pageID=24>.

53. Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri, *Mukhtasar Shahadati ala al-Jihad fi al-Jaza'ir* (A summary of my testimony concerning the jihad in Algeria) (N.p., June 1,

2004), <http://www.archive.org/details/Syria-ozooo10>. Hereafter cited as *Summary Testimony/Arabic*.

54. *Summary Testimony/Arabic*, 5. “Experiences” does not capture the nuances of the Arabic term *tajribah*, which also means “trial,” “attempt,” and “tribulation.”

55. See *ibid.*, 56, for al-Suri’s strong denial of the main accusations against him and his bitter reference to the “Saudi journalist” who authored the offending articles.

56. *Call/Arabic*, 56.

57. *Summary Testimony/Arabic*, 5–6.

58. *Call/Arabic*, 57.

59. Abu Hafs al-Masri (also Mohammad Atef) was killed in a U.S. airstrike in November 2001 near Kabul.

60. *Summary Testimony/Arabic*, 6.

61. Secretary Donald Rumsfeld used the phrase in an interview reported by the *Washington Times* on October 23, 2003. See “Rumsfeld Pushes ‘New Sense of Urgency,’” *Washington Times* (October 23, 2003). Even in hiding and presumably still moving from place to place, al-Suri was still able to keep up with American news.

62. *Call/Arabic*, 6.

63. *Call/Arabic*, 1355.

64. *Call/Arabic*, 1356. I have translated the headings of a chart in which al-Suri summarizes the effects of various approaches to jihad. Movement organizations would be like the GIA in Algeria; open fronts would be like Chechnya or AQAP; individual or small-cell terrorism would be like the Madrid or London bombings, or even the shootings in Fort Hood by Nidal Hassan.

65. As usual, al-Suri is focused on Sunni insurrections. He does not consider Iran, although he must have known that al-Zawahiri reputedly went to Iran after the revolution to find out how the Islamic revolutionaries there were able to achieve what had eluded successive waves of likeminded men in Egypt. In his *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner*, al-Zawahiri had clandestine local jihadist organizations in mind when he warned against turning jihad into a struggle of elites against the government. Instead al-Zawahiri believed that jihadists should lead in the midst of the people, a Maoist maxim that al-Suri also embraces.

66. *Call/Arabic*, 1357.

67. *Call/Arabic*, 1359.

68. For a description of the personal differences between Bin Laden and al-Suri, see Lia, *Architect*, 278–292.

69. *Call/Arabic*, 1361.

70. Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 57. See also Murad Batal al-Shishani, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Fighters in Chechnya* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, September 14, 2006).

71. *Call*/Arabic, 1363.

72. *Ibid.*, 1364.

73. *Ibid.*, 1365.

74. *Ibid.*, 1367–1404.

75. *Ibid.*, 1405–1413.

76. *Ibid.*, 1368. Al-Suri cites Mao, Che Guevara, Giap, and Castro.

77. *Ibid.*, 1422.

78. Al-Suri never cites Naji. This oversight could be a matter of security. The scheme of three-stage guerrilla warfare is the same, however, with only slight variations. For example, Naji contemplated the consolidation of areas of chaos administered by jihadists, whereas al-Suri saw consolidation occurring in the third stage.

79. *Call*/Arabic, 1370.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*

82. Al-Suri uses ancient terms “the land behind the river” for what the old term “Transoxiana” is an approximation and “Ifriqiya” for the countries west of Egypt along the Mediterranean coast. As we discussed, Naji referred to al-Suri for this type of analysis, although he had never read *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*.

83. The Arabic original and an English translation of al-Suri’s work on Central Asia may be found in the Harmony Database, entitled *The Muslims in Central Asia and the Upcoming Battle of Islam*. To find both documents, search for AFGP-2002-002871-Trans-Meta at the West Point website, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu>.

84. Al-Suri’s analysis of jihad in Yemen may be found at *Call*/Arabic, 773–780.

85. *Ibid.*, 1368.

86. *Ibid.*, 1369.

87. General Vo Nguyen Giap, *People’s War People’s Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 82.

88. *Call*/Arabic, 1374–1378.

89. *Ibid.*, 1378–1379.

90. For an account of American activities in Afghanistan immediately after 9/11, see Gary C. Schroen, *First In: An Insider’s Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* (New York: Presidio, 2007); and Gary Bernstein and Ralph Pezzullo, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda: A Personal Account by the CIA’s Key Field Commander* (New York: Crown, 2005), 51–120.

91. *Call*/Arabic, 1379.

92. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 143–146; for a further description of Beam’s concept of leaderless resistance and its connection to the white supremacist movement in the United States,

see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 115–116. It is unlikely that al-Suri drew on Beam's thought.

93. The analysis of the relationship between open-front jihad and individual resistance units is based on *Call/Arabic*, 1403.

94. Ibid., 1402. The word translated as "talent" is *malakah*, which can mean "character trait, aptitude, knack, natural disposition, or gift." Al-Suri claims it is like the talent for music, poetry, drawing, or any other art.

95. Ibid., 1413.

96. See Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi, "Hurub al-Jil al-Rabi'" ("Fourth-generation warfare"), *Majallah Al-Ansar* 2 (January 28, 2002): 15–21, <http://www.tawhed.ws/c?i=324>.

97. *Call/Arabic*, 1405.

98. Ibid., 1406.

99. Ibid., 1406–1408.

100. Ibid., 1407. As noted previously, this phrase is an echo of al-Zawahiri's phrase in *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* and is no doubt intended to comply with the Egyptian's recommendation to the community. It also can be traced in a general sense to one of the maxims of Vladimir Lenin as quoted by Giap in *People's War People's Army*, 77.

101. The Arabic plural *manahij* is the same word translated as "program" when it appears in the singular elsewhere in this book, but here it has the ordinary meaning of a program of studies or curriculum. Also, the use of the passive voice is not common in Arabic; when used as in "they are provided" it indicates that the author does not know the identity of the one who performs the action. In this case al-Suri is deliberately indicating that the information may be provided from any source—a website, for example, or word of mouth.

102. *Call/Arabic*, 1407.

103. Lia, *Architect*, 445 n. 2.

104. *Call/Arabic*, 1407–1408.

105. *Call/Arabic*, 1408.

106. The description of these units is based on *Call/Arabic*, 1409–1413.

107. Awlaki, who, before his death, had been tied to both Nidal Hassan, the Fort Hood shooter, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian student who confessed to attempting to ignite explosives in his underwear while aboard Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas 2009. The emir of AQAP claimed responsibility for Abdulmutallab's attempted attack as a response to alleged American attacks on al-Qaeda in Yemen. This incident demonstrates Naji's concept of "paying the price" in action. In this case, Abdulmutallab was expected to be a suicide bomber.

108. The illustration appears on *Call/Arabic*, 1411.

109. Ibid., 1412.

110. See Lia, *Architect*, 72. Lia points out that al-Suri recalled that he arrived in Peshawar, where he met Abdullah Azzam at seven o'clock on 7/7/1987 and remarked that there were "four sevens." Lia wryly comments

that the fact that the London bombings occurred on “7 July and al-Suri was mentioned in the press as a possible suspect must be a pure coincidence.”

111. *Call*/Arabic, 1409.

112. *Ibid.*, 1409.

113. *Ibid.*, 1414.

114. *Ibid.*, 1415–1416.

115. *Ibid.*, 1416–1417.

116. *Ibid.*, 1419.

117. For an account of how the United States approached countering al-Qaeda’s narrative (2001–2011), see Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, *Counterstrike: The Untold Story of America’s Secret Campaign Against Al-Qaeda* (New York: Henry Holt, 2011), 152–179.

Conclusion: What It All Means

1. For text of this article, see Yasin Musharbash, “Al-Qaida Kills Eight Times More Muslims Than Non-Muslims,” *Spiegel Online International* (December 3, 2009), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,660619,00.html>.

2. For a description of some of the most prominent government prodemocracy programs, see “Reports on the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED),” <http://pomed.org/publications/reports/#.TshdVmAzL2k>.

3. Brian Michael Jenkins, “Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Terrorist Radicalization in the United States Since September 11, 2001,” RAND Corporation (2010), ix, http://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP292.html.

Appendix 1: Translation of “Revolutionary Wars”

[The following notes were in al-Qurashi’s article.]

1. Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: The Foreign Language Press, 1963).

2. Paret and Shy, *Guerrillas in the 1960s* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

3. Peter Paret, “The French Army,” 59.

4. Vo Nguyen Giap, *People’s War*, 48.

5. E. L. Katzenback, “Time, Space, and Will: The Politics and Military Views of Mao Tse-tung,” ed. Col. T. N. Greene.

6. R. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, 32.

7. Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 65.

Appendix 2: Translation of “Fourth-Generation Warfare”

[The following notes were in al-Qurashi’s article.]

1. William S. Lind, Colonel Keith Nightengale (USA), Captain John F. Schmitt (USMC), Colonel Joseph W. Sutton (USA), and Lieutenant Colonel

Gary I. Wilson (USMCR), "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine [Corps] Gazette* (October 1989): 22–26.

2. Blitzkrieg.

3. Same article cited previously. [The original English sentence in the 1989 article reads: "Television news may become a more powerful operational weapon than armored divisions." The second quote translates exactly as the original English sentence in the 1989 article.]

4. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette* (September 1994).

5. Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Washington, D.C.

6. Anthony James Joes, *Guerilla Warfare, A Historical, Biographical, and Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Greenwood Press, 1996).

7. Lieutenant Colonel Timothy L. Thomas, "Lessons from Grozny," *Military Review* (July–August 2000).

8. Vincent J. Goulding Jr., "Back to the Future with Asymmetric Warfare," *Parameters* (Winter 2000–2001).

9. The former Chechen minister of propaganda, Movladi [Saidarbievich] Udugov, was superior to the Russian propaganda machine as a whole. He did not miss an opportunity to announce the Chechen position on the Russian and international media and to torpedo the Russian lying directly and powerfully [in Arabic]. See Goulding, "Back to the Future with Asymmetric Warfare."

10. Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York University Press, 1998).

11. Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, "The Terror," *Survival* 43, no. 4 (January 2002).

12. Goulding, "Back to the Future with Asymmetric Warfare."

13. Karl von Clausewitz (1780–1831).

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